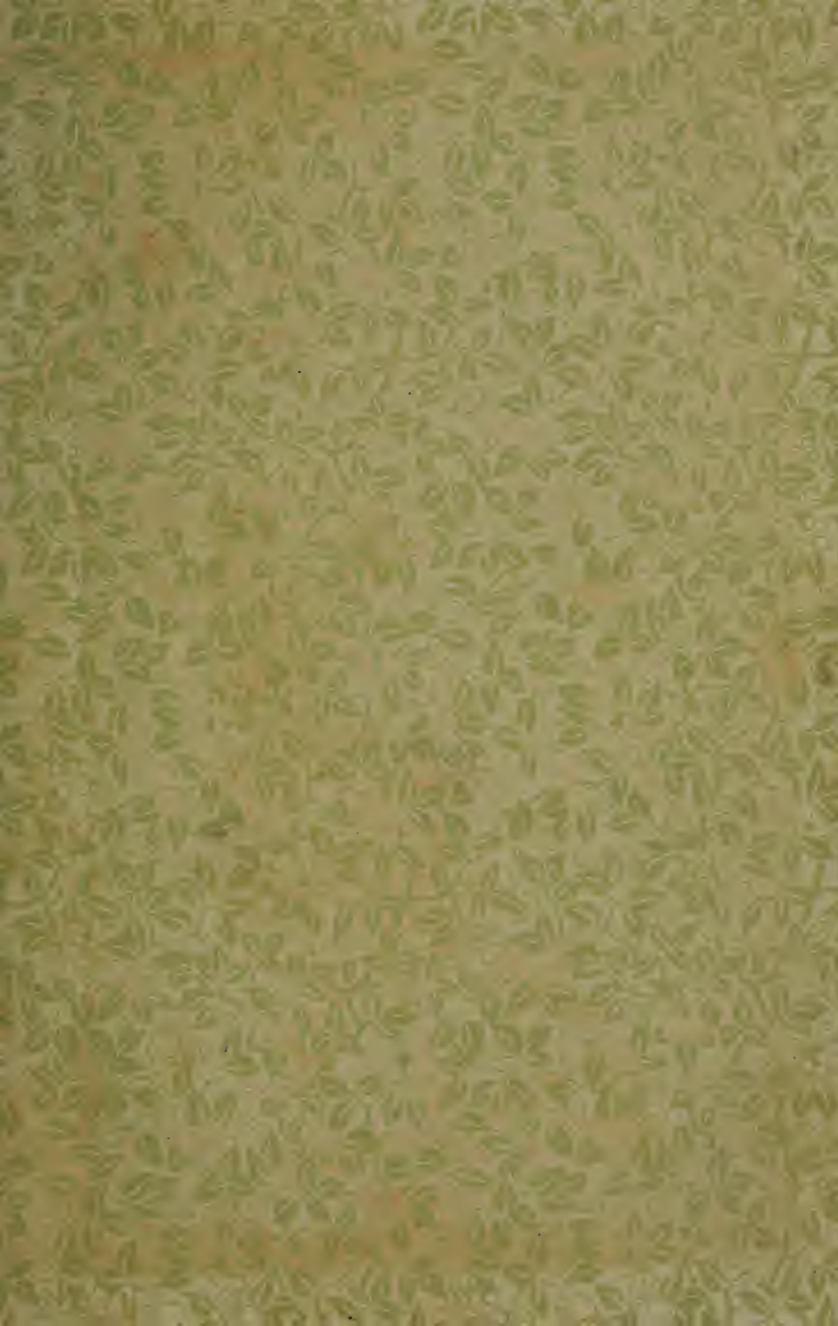




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THE FOREIGNERS

A Novel

BY

ELEANOR C. PRICE

AUTHORESS OF "A FRENCH HEIRESS," "VALENTINA," ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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THE FOREIGNERS.

CHAPTER I.

PAULINE IN THE PARK.

LONDON and the Park were looking their brightest and most springlike one morning at the end of April, when two young people got out of a cab at Albert Gate, and, crossing over, strolled up and down under the trees watching the riders. They were both good-looking and well dressed. The fair beauty and elegance of the girl drew many eyes upon her, for the park was fuller than usual that sunny spring day. Her companion was insignificant beside her, not that he thought so himself, for he evidently felt

like a good specimen of a London young man. For some time they were rather silent; both looked grave and dreamy; only now and then she replied carelessly and shortly to some remark of his. Her manner did not seem to trouble him much; but presently, returning to the subject they had been talking off before, he said to her,

“So you think it awfully dismal, do you?”

“Well, yes; don’t you?”

“I am more used to it, you see. Being away all day, and not going home till late, with plenty of things to interest one, the difference does not strike one so strongly. Of course to you, coming from such a different house, and stopping there all day, and seeing the ins and outs of the struggle, it’s trying, no doubt. You feel the discomfort that mother hides from us.”

"Yes; she does hide it from you, Ralph, as much as she possibly can. I think she tries too hard. It is wearing her out. Do you notice the gray hairs and the lines in her face that never used to be there?"

"Still, when you consider her age, it was almost time for her to begin to expect them."

"Nonsense! She is only forty-five."

"Well, forty-five! That is a good deal more than half-way. Yes, I've noticed them; but I don't think she is unhappy, you know, Polly."

"You would never see it if she was."

"I don't know. I saw that you were moping, and that was why I asked you to come up with me to-day. I thought it would do you good to see people, and to talk about it. There certainly is no room for that at home."

“Thank you. No ; indeed there is not.”

“At any rate, you don’t see your fellow-creatures down at Croome,” said Ralph, looking about him with satisfaction. “Shall we go to the other side, or do you like the horses best?”

“Let us stay here,” said Pauline.

They sat down under a tree, and their talk flagged for a few minutes, while their fellow creatures, riding and walking, passed up and down, and more and more carriages began to roll along the drive.

“And you like this? You often come here?” said Pauline to her brother. There was a slight touch of wondering contempt in her tone. Pauline, in this fit of low spirits, was forgetting to be amiable, and this was a sad change in her ; but Ralph did not seem to notice it. The family misfortunes had apparently done him anything but harm ; he was

more manly, more modest, and more cheerful. It was evidently good for him to earn his own living.

"Now and then, when I have nothing else to do," he said.

"You like standing by, and looking at society over a fence?"

"O come, Polly, I am not so proud as you. It is all a matter of money. I haven't got it, and they have; why shouldn't I be amused with looking at them?"

"Ah, well, people feel differently. I should hate to live in or near London, unless I was rich and could do everything that other people did."

"That's bosh. What can other people's doings matter to you? Thousands of these people would give their money to be like you," said Ralph, suddenly smiling as he looked at her.

“They would like to have such a wonderful possession as a brother who pays compliments, I daresay,” said Pauline, smiling in her turn. “But even for that, my dear, they certainly would not give their money; and when you are a year or two older you will know that very well.”

“I don’t undervalue money; never did. But I do think it possible to live and enjoy one’s self without such a great lot of it.”

“Not in London.”

“Even in London, I think. But after all, that doesn’t concern you. You are not likely to live in London at present.”

“No. And I don’t want to think about myself, but about father and mother. I do wish they had more to live upon. He is getting anxious, Ralph; and if he loses his dear bright spirits, it will be worse than mother’s gray hairs. He told me the other day that publishers were

not an encouraging race of people. Of course he laughed; but it was the first time I had heard him speak despondingly about those things."

"What I am afraid of is," said Ralph, "that he will take to printing these books at his own risk. I know how that would end. We must try and prevent his doing that, at all costs. I think, do you know, Aunt Lucia might help him more than she does."

Pauline sighed "Yes," she said, "but who is to suggest it to her? And she is doing enough for us already; she has got me."

"Your tone of voice wouldn't gratify her," said Ralph. "That's not much, after all. You don't cost more than a hundred a year, I daresay. You eat little enough, you want no ball-dresses there at Croome, and this is the first journey you've had

since last summer—since you belonged to her, in fact. But of course there's the future to think of. It's plain that she means you to be her heir. So I don't think you need complain, Mrs. Pauline. You will be the richest of us all in the end, and there will be no more looking at society over a fence, as you describe what you and I are doing now."

"Don't flatter yourself," said Pauline, and then she stopped short. She generally was careful to avoid the subject of her aunt's intentions, being aware that she did not wish them to be known. Sometimes the girl wished that she did not know them herself; the consciousness that all the ease of her present life must come to a sudden end one day had something souring in it, something that drove away peace and enjoyment, keeping her mind restless as to the future. If Aunt

Lucia would have left things uncertain, one might have been a little justified in enjoying the day as it passed, and even in building castles for days to come; but there are limits to self-deception, and Pauline's sharp lesson last year had left her with a larger share of cold prudence and anxiety. Somehow, too, Aunt Lucia's youth made her feel old. She was very fond of her, but their natures were too entirely different for real sympathy; the elder woman's romance often made the younger one smile.

"Who will be, if you are not?" said Ralph, pursuing his argument.

"How can I tell?" said Pauline, evasively.

"Not Dunstan, surely? By the bye, how is he getting on now at Croome? Has he quite got over his notion of going back to the north?"

“Yes, I think so, for the present.”

“I wonder Aunt Lucia troubles herself to keep him. Wasn’t he very nearly off in the autumn? She wrote a mad sort of letter to father about the living.”

“I believe he did mean to go then,” Pauline answered. “But she found she could not do without him, and he came back again after a few weeks. She likes him better than anybody, you know.”

“Well, I daresay he is not a bad fellow,” said Ralph, kindly. “Only I hate affectation, and I don’t see the sense of a parson trying to look like other men—which he never succeeds in doing, by the bye. Ben Dunstan wouldn’t look like a layman if he dressed himself all in blue. Well, Philip thinks there is nobody like him, and I suppose he is a good man, but he’s not the man to have Croome. You don’t mean to say you think that likely?”

"Anything is likely. You know Aunt Lucia."

"Do you think he tries to get round her?"

"No; most certainly not. He is perfectly honest and perfectly unworldly," Pauline answered, with earnestness.

She felt it necessary to do Ben full justice, the more that he had been a cause of vexation to her all through that winter. Miss Mowbray, with a curious quiet obstinacy, which lay underneath all her whims, and made it impossible for her to give up a pet project, unless it was driven off by a more attractive one, had no sooner realised the utter hopelessness and absurdity of Pauline's French love-affair than she determined, in her own mind, to keep Ben at Croome. By some arguments she prevailed over his stubbornness, which, after all, was not so great as

hers, and persuaded him to remain Rector of Croome ; so after a few weeks' absence, as Pauline told her brother, he came back again. They once more saw each other constantly ; this could not be helped, though Ben was very stiff at first, and avoided the Court as much as possible. Pauline had no reason to complain that he teased her, or that his manner to her was not just as quiet and indifferent as hers to him ; but of course she knew very well that he and Aunt Lucia had the same thing in their heads always ; and does not one see every day in the world how an idea that is at first scouted as odious smooths down its ugly points in time ? how its attractions, such as they are, come into fuller view, so that the impossible becomes possible ? Miss Mowbray knew the world better than either Ben or Pauline ; she knew, alas, though she hardly

told herself the sad worldly truth, that, as long as a golden light shone from her on Ben, his chance was improving every day.

Happy as she was with Aunt Lucia, Pauline would gladly have escaped from Croome any time in that winter ; but she had nowhere else to go. She wished to live at home, and when her aunt sent her there for a month's visit in the spring, she came, hoping that her father and mother would not consent to part with her again. But she soon found that another useless person would be a burden on the household, whose struggling existence, a kind of life she had never realised till now, made her miserable ; she saw that she was helpless, and must go patiently back to Croome. She asked her mother one day if there was no work, nothing that she could do to help them. Mrs. Mowbray kissed her, and stroked her fair head.

“No, darling,” she said; “it is a comfort and help for us to think of you quite safe and happy with Aunt Lucia; she knows how grateful we are. We only want to see you strong and contented. The others are good children, and we are all very happy together.”

Poor Mrs. Mowbray, no doubt, deceived herself as to the future, and as to the amount of gratitude owed to Aunt Lucia; but Pauline could say nothing about that. For the present, at least, Croome Court was plainly her home.

If Ralph and Pauline had not been very much interested in their own affairs, they might have noticed a tall young man, dark, pale, grave, and dignified, who came walking slowly along under those same trees. If they had not sat down when they did they must have met him face to face. As it was, he

lifted his eyes, saw Pauline as she turned out of the path, and quietly moved away behind the trees to avoid her. Then he walked up and down in the background, watching those two as they sat and talked together. It is probable that all the people there, except Ralph and Pauline, noticed him, and even in a place so public and cosmopolitan wondered who he was. The Marquis de Maulévrier was not dressed like a London dandy, or quite like a young Englishman at all. There was something stately and graceful about him, an old-fashioned air, perhaps, with a little additional stiffness owing to this new and uncongenial country. With his dark eyes and his solemnity, he looked like a Spanish grandee; he might have been a wandering prince in more romantic days than ours.

But one knows that poor Gérard, in spite of his imposing looks, was only a restless and lonely and disappointed man. He had no hope, no future. He had come to England after the long dismal winter at Maulévrier, chiefly at his mother's wish, for she was almost frightened by his daily melancholy. She knew, and so did he, that the Mowbrays had lived far away in the west, and he came without any idea of seeking them out, or of going anywhere beyond London.

"One ought to see London," said the Marquise, and Gérard agreed with her.

He had now been in London twenty-four hours, had looked about him, had decided that it was hopelessly inferior to Paris; and had made up his mind to go back the next day and run down to Biarritz, where he might find a few old acquaintances. In London he was alone:

his mother had ordered him to pay visits to two or three French people, old friends of his fathers; but he felt disinclined to do anything that would keep him longer in the country. He was quite sure that England was an odious country; he saw no one that reminded him in the least of Mr. Mowbray, for whose sake he had once felt inclined to like all Englishmen; and he had strolled into the Park that morning in search of quietness and fresh air, thinking he would see no one so early. Being disappointed, he was trying to make his way past all these people, to find, if possible, some part of the Park where one might walk alone, when Pauline Mowbray and her companion came towards him, and turned out of the path to sit down in the pleasant shade.

“She is married!” was the immediate

thought of the Frenchman. "And lately, too; for see how much they have to say to each other! He is very young—only a boy—rich, no doubt, or they could not have married, for I suppose her father could give her nothing. Ah, she is not happy; she is discontented, she hardly smiles as she talks to him. No wonder; he is a wretched indifferent boy; he looks more at the horses than at her."

Poor Ralph did not know how hardly he was being criticised by the dark figure in the background, who, all the time that he and Pauline sat there talking, was within sight of them, though never very near. Gérard's mistake would have struck him as ridiculous, yet it was not; for certainly a girl like Pauline would not have been allowed to go out in Paris with no companion but her brother. Besides, last

yeaar, Puline had always talked of her brothers as schoolboys, which they then were, Ralph having grown up suddenly ; and there was no family likeness between her fair self and the dark obstinate features of Ralph. Gérard's mistake was most natural and reasonable.

The next question in his mind was ought he to go and speak to her? She had not seen him, and the matter was entirely in his own hands. He did not think he wished to speak to her. It must be painful. He had forgotten nothing, and a certain paleness and depression that he saw in her seemed to say that she also had a memory. If she had been blooming, contented, laughing, and happy ; if he could have felt sure that his presence or absence would make no difference to her, that the dark boy's victory was secure, that no old love

could have power to throw a shadow, then Gérard thought he might have gone up and talked for ten minutes on the strength of the old acquaintance. Her indifference would have made it easy for him to seem indifferent too. This was a strange mixture of feelings. The longer he watched her, sitting beside the young man under the trees yonder, the less calm he became. He knew that on his side, at least, the old love had only slept, and that the sight of her had already roused it to strong and painful life again. He was half angry with her—most unreasonably—forgetting that if Françoise de Brye had been as resigned as himself, he would have been married long ago.

On the whole it became every moment more difficult to go and present himself to Pauline, whose new name even was

unknown to him ; and he lingered about in his indecision till she settled the question by getting up and walking away rather quickly with her companion.

Monsieur de Maulévrier followed them a little distance, but she never looked round. They crossed the road, and were soon lost to sight behind carriages and people.

He presently went back to his hotel, and spent most of the afternoon walking up and down his room, now bitterly regretting that he had not spoken to her. He had come to London with no hopes, no projects connected with her. He knew that her home was a long way off and had never for a moment expected to see her. Ever since they parted, that morning at Maulévrier, he had known that the affair was hopeless and at an end. He was no more able to marry her now than when he had been engaged to

Françoise de Brye; yet he had never thought seriously of her marrying any one else, and this discovery was a horrid shock to him. Still, he had been a fool not to speak to her; for he must positively know who the dark fellow was, where she lived, whether she was happy; he could not go back to France in this tantalising state of uncertainty.

Then he thought of her father, who had always been so friendly to him. He had his address at Cleeve. Now that Pauline was married, and in London, there could be no harm in going down to Cleeve and paying a visit to Mr. Mowbray. One would see the beautiful West of England, which the Mowbrays used to talk of so affectionately; one would hear all the truth about everything.

“I will go to-morrow,” the Marquis decided with himself.

CHAPTER II.

AN AFTERNOON AT CLEEVE.

CROOME was not an easy place to approach by railway. Few trains stopped at its little way-side station, and for these one generally had to wait a long time at Cleeve.

Pauline knew that she would have quite two hours to wait there when she returned to Aunt Lucia, the day but one after her walk with Ralph in the Park. She was not at all happy. She knew that her father and mother, like Ralph, were satisfied in their minds about her future, and thought that her aunt had adopted her, in the most generous sense of the word. Pauline felt that they were

a little unreasonable, and wished to undeceive them; but this was difficult without telling them all she knew; and it seemed cruel, besides, to take away the one bright gleam of good fortune which cheered their lives now.

Pauline was not at all of a hard or an enduring disposition; she neither liked to bear pain herself, nor to give it to other people; she had a way of making life liveable by looking out for compensations, and driving disagreeable facts out of her head. Much as she loved her own people, the month spent with them had been extremely depressing; she had felt her own helplessness, and certainly did not think less of money from being confronted with the want of it.

Now she was going back to Aunt Lucia and Croome, and—to be quite truthful about Pauline—the further the train

carried her from London, the nearer she came to those quiet regions of the west, the more she succeeded in comforting herself, in reasoning out the lesson that one must make the best of things, and take contentedly what life offered one, even if it was not, and never could be, what one would have chosen for one's self.

"After all, as I'm not a boy, and can't work, this is better for us all than my living at home," Pauline told herself. "As to what is to come — why, nobody knows."

This conclusion may have been accompanied by a slight mental shrug. There had always been visible in Pauline's character a mixture of her father's sentiment and her mother's common sense. Last year the first had reigned supreme, and having made a sad failure, seemed now, perhaps wisely, to have given up the

reins to the other. But Pauline had not all her mother's good qualities, and there is a kind of lazy selfishness which some people mistake for prudence.

However, poor girl, she felt tolerably lonely when the train drew up at Cleeve station, where, in old days, two or three bright faces would have been watching for her. Her aunt had talked of sending a maid to meet her, but Pauline could not even see the maid, as she looked up and down the platform. Her new philosophy was immediately tried, however, by the sight of a familiar face, and proved itself equal to the occasion.

When Ben Dunstan came forward, she met him with a smile, on which his steady gravity relaxed at once. Of course Pauline did not care to see *him*, but she was a little glad to see any one who certainly cared to see her. It is an old story, and

the only explanation of many arrangements in this life.

“Here you are!” said Ben. “How did you leave them all at Sandridge?”

“Very well, thank you,” Pauline answered, cheerfully. “Have you seen Ray anywhere? My aunt said she would send her to meet me.”

“She is not come; she had a headache,” said Ben.

“One of her bad headaches, poor thing!”

“Yesterday, yes. I was there in the afternoon, and as your aunt was in a fuss, I told her I must be in Cleeve to-day, and could meet you and see to your luggage. Are those your things? Western line, 4.5,” said Ben to the porter, who came up touching his cap in recognition of Pauline.

“How horrid it is to wait so long!”

she remarked. "I suppose I had better go and see somebody—Mrs. Marsh or Mrs. Lawrence."

"Miss Mowbray supposed you would do something of that kind," said Ben. "You would tell them about the fashions, she said; she talked about the shops in Bond Street, and said you would be able to describe them. And of course poor old Mrs. Lawrence can see nothing for herself."

"The shops, the fashions! I have nothing to tell Mrs. Lawrence, so I won't go to her," said Pauline, rebelliously.

"What, you haven't been in Bond Street? Well, but you know, down here, we expect people to come back very brilliant from London. We sit round and hang upon their words."

"You will find it a sad waste of time for once," said Pauline, smiling.

"Are you very sorry to come back?" said Ben, in a different tone.

"No," she said, "I believe I am rather glad. I don't like London."

"That seems odd ; but your aunt will be pleased," said Ben. "It is extraordinary to hear an intelligent person talk as she does. Instead of being proud of London, she almost seems to despise it."

"Yes ; I agree with her—I despise it," said Pauline. "Not exactly, though ; I believe my feeling is envy. Ralph took me into the Park on Tuesday, and was surprised because I did not like looking at smarter people than myself."

"Waste and show—of course not."

"No, not at all. I should have liked to share in the waste and show, and was angry because I could not."

Pauline talked away, rather happy in her grumblings, and not caring in the least

what impression she made on Ben Dunstan. They were now walking together up the shady road outside the station which led into the pleasant town of Cleeve.

“Pity you came away so soon,” he said, gravely. “You should have taken a good long course of Park when you were about it. But I did not mean that part of the business, you know. I was thinking more of the East End, and all the splendid work they do in London. Society is nothing to me.”

“It would be everything to me, if I could really enjoy it,” said Pauline.

“Mrs. Marsh will sympathise with you,” said Ben. “I have heard her say the same thing. She is banished and wasted down here. This is her corner is it not? So I’ll leave you.”

“Good-bye,” said Pauline. He had spoken rather rudely, and now vanished

suddenly; yet she had not felt angry, and was sorry that he chose to go.

“What a bear he is!” she said to herself, half-smiling; and then she looked along Mrs. Marsh’s road.

It was dusty and sunny; the road into the town was much pleasanter. It would be a bore to talk to Mrs. Marsh—a kind stupid old woman, an admiral’s widow, who thought herself a great person, and was generally made a fuss with at Cleeve. But Aunt Lucia and Ben, apparently, had settled that Pauline was to spend her afternoon thus. She felt tired and resigned, and did not know what else to do; and she began walking very slowly in the direction of Mrs. Marsh.

There were, of course, plenty more acquaintances in Cleeve; but they lived scattered here and there, and most of

them a long way from the station; also Mrs. Marsh was the most harmless. She had been very kind to the Mowbray boys and girls in the old days, and Pauline felt more inclined to confront one quiet old lady than a number of talking questioning young people; yet she wished much more to avoid every one.

She had not parted from Ben more than two or three minutes when a step behind her turned out to be his, and his gruff voice sounded at her shoulder.

“You have a headache, haven’t you?” he said.

“No—yes—I think not,” said Pauline, vaguely. “I shall have one very soon. Are you coming to Mrs. Marsh, too?”

“Not I; but it struck me you might like to do something else. Would you care to walk up to the Point? I

thought of going there, just to see the Lodge and all the old place again; but perhaps you would rather not."

Pauline hesitated a moment. He stood looking at her, gravely waiting for her answer.

"I should like it very much," she said at last; "only don't make me talk when we are up there."

"No," said Ben.

He was not exactly surprised that, having said this, she talked of her own accord all the way—along the green path outside the town, between its gardens and the sea; then through the lane where the tall hedgerow elms were coming into leaf; then upon the sloping down, the rough familiar path leading under fruit-trees in white and pink—the short cut to the Lodge garden which the young Mowbrays had made for themselves.

A little wind was blowing out at sea—they could hear the waves splashing on the other side, where the down broke into gray cliff—and the pine-wood beyond, high above their heads, was singing sadly to the breeze; but they were sheltered, and felt nothing but the sweet freshness of the air. It seemed to Pauline that she had not breathed such air for years; not since she was a girl, such a very long time ago. She felt herself quite an old and worldly woman now. A pity; and these dear old walks seemed to say so; but was it one's own fault, after all? They skirted the wall of the garden, now strangers' ground, and climbed up into the pine-wood on their way to the Point. Ben was not at all an aggressive companion; he did not ask many questions, and Pauline did not think of him much as she talked to him.

She told him a great deal about her father and mother, about their little home at Sandridge, about the children and all their doings. Ralph would have been surprised to hear himself reckoned among the children. There was a kind of sad pleasure in telling this history to any one who knew them all so well, and by his goodness to Philip had earned a real interest in them. Not that Ben was very sympathising; he evidently thought it no great hardship to live in a small house and consider one's pence, and bestow some thought on legs of mutton; but Pauline had an instinct that his hardness was more in theory than in practice, and she talked to him in a way that made Ben secretly happy. It seemed almost as if both of them had forgotten his rash and ill-advised behaviour in the autumn; for this might

have been the old time before Pauline went to France, except that Ben was more grave, matter-of-fact, and even grumpy. But under the circumstances, his quiet unsentimental manner made it easier to get on with him. The few questions he asked were practical ones, about the boys, and about Mr. Mowbray's books, under their business aspect. Pauline told him all she thought and feared, and he spoke hopefully: the boys were good boys, and Mr. Mowbray had real talent, which would no doubt soon be recognised.

"He's not like me," said Ben. "If the Bishop was to put an extinguisher on me, I should have to dig in the fields. I couldn't write a book to save my life."

"Have you been quarrelling with the Bishop?" said Pauline, a little absently.

“No ; but I may, one of these days.”

They both became silent as they reached the top of the cliff, and were blown by the breeze, and looked out, and saw the “white sails flying on the yellow sea.” One or two islands, or rather rocks, were faintly shadowed in the distance ; the old childish feeling of magic and mystery came over Pauline as she gazed across the water.

Ben walked a little way further on, leaving her alone on the high point ; he, too, remembered the merry voices that used to shout there ; and he remembered, with a tenderness betrayed to no one, that afternoon last summer when he came up with Mr. Mowbray, and found her lying on cushions in the midst of the children, soft, and gentle, and smiling, with a smile even for him, by which he had been fool enough to feel very much

encouraged. He could not quite understand her now, and in his private opinion it would have been better for her to live with her own family and share their troubles.

"There is something wrong with her," thought Ben. "She is not contented. Perhaps some day she may change her mind—even yet—"

He turned round to look at her, and saw that she was coming towards him, so he hurried up the hill to meet her.

"It is very pretty," she said; "but there is nothing to do here. Shall we go back to the town? I am afraid I am boring you very much."

"No, you are not," said Ben. "Tired of it, are you? Well, let us go down."

As they walked back she began to talk about her aunt, asking if she had missed her much.

"Of course," said Ben, in his driest tone.

"Has she told you so?"

"Yes, a dozen times."

Pauline glanced at him with a laugh in her eyes. If he had been anybody else she might have asked him if he was jealous; but, after all, Ben had set up a barrier by his foolishness in the autumn; it was impossible to be quite so easily intimate now. This was unfortunate, for he was a good creature—an excellent creature—Miss Pauline Mowbray assured herself.

In the wood, as they went down, they met a woman, who greeted Pauline cordially. She was the old gardener's wife at the Lodge.

"Well, now," she said, "it's funny as things should happen like this. Yesterday evening, a good bit later than this, who

should I meet but a young gentleman at this very spot. He was wandering about lost-like, and asked me the way back to the town. I made shift to understand him, but it wasn't that easy, for he was a foreigner."

"Foreigners don't come here very often, do they, Mrs. Selwood? I remember a German once," said Pauline.

"Do you, Miss? Well, this was a Frenchman, and he knew the master, and was inquiring after him. But it seemed he'd heard in the town that the master was gone away, so he hadn't been to the house, but was walking about here to pass the time-like. I don't think he was after no mischief, though my husband said maybe he was; but French or no French, he was a gentleman, if ever I see one."

Pauline was now listening intently to Mrs. Selwood. There stood the good

woman in her white apron, her broad smiling face and honest gray eyes under a clean sun-bonnet, speaking slowly in her sweet west-country tones. Pauline had turned a little pale as she listened.

Ben, standing behind her, looked stolidly grave, as usual; but his ears were wide open, and in his heart he was quite ready to second good gardener Selwood. The shadows moved and played on the red ground, for the breeze was getting up now and the pine-tops were rushing like waves and singing in the air.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGER.

THAT morning Miss Mowbray was stepping about her garden in the sunshine. One could not say that she *walked* in her garden; the expression would be far too prosaic for her. She had a way of moving lightly, with her pretty figure erect and her head high, as if she rather despised the earth that carried her. Thus she rambled here and there, from trees to flowers, from lawn to greenhouses, giving her fanciful orders everywhere, with her scissors in one hand, and a large parasol in the other. She was happy that morning, for Pauline was coming back, and she had missed her very much during

the month she was away. The house must be filled with flowers to welcome her.

Miss Mowbray was rather pleased and amused at the stroke of policy—was it her own or Ben's?—which had sent him to meet Pauline at Cleeve and to make himself useful to her. Poor old Ray's headache had not come in so badly this time as it generally did.

In the course of her wanderings Miss Mowbray strayed into the hall to fetch a basket, and coming out again upon the lawn, saw a stranger at the gate, which was opposite the house, under the shade of some tall elm trees.

Croome Court was looking its best that morning; sunshine always became it wonderfully. Its broad red front, all embroidered with pale and graceful festoons of wistaria, lay in the full, still,

calm sunshine, as solid in its beauty as its mistress was ethereal in hers ; the great trees on one side rose high above the chimneys, they and their shadows all a fine graceful tracery, more beautiful than heavy foliage ; the rooks made a sleepy noise about their high houses. All else was so still that the rippling splash of the stream, under the arches of the old stone bridge which carried the road across it, could be plainly heard as one stood at the house-door. The mill was not working, and there was no other sound about the Court except the occasional passing of wheels, and the footsteps of some one who, like this stranger, came down the hill and over the bridge on his way from the station half a mile off.

Miss Mowbray paused ; she was turning towards her favourite walled garden, but as this person came in at the gate his

looks attracted and puzzled her. She ended by going a few steps to meet him, having perceived that her visitor was a singularly handsome and distinguished-looking young man. He took off his hat as they approached each other, and made her a low bow. Miss Mowbray, whose manners were rather demonstrative, acknowledged this most graciously. He then spoke to her in English, with a strong French accent. She, whose dislike of foreigners, like most of her prejudices, was purely theoretical, forgot it altogether, and was very much interested.

“I have been at Cleeve,” he said to her, “in search of an old acquaintance of mine—Mr. Mowbray—but I find he has left the town. May I hope, madame, that you will pardon my calling on you?”

“I am very glad to see you,” said Miss Mowbray. “My nephew’s friends are

always welcome. Yes, he has gone away to live at Sandridge, near London."

"Thank you very much. I had his address at Cleeve, and I went yesterday afternoon to his house there, but they could not tell me much about him. I then paid a visit to the pastor, to Monsieur le Curé of Cleeve, but he was just going out to his church and had no time for me. He could not give me M. Mowbray's address but he gave me yours, madame. I therefore stayed the night at Cleeve, and ventured to come to you this morning. He assured me that you could tell me all I want to know."

"With great pleasure," said Miss Mowbray. "Will you come in?"

"I do not wish to detain you from your garden and the sunshine," said Gérard.

He looked round him, then at Miss Mowbray, and smiled. She smiled too

at him. This impressionable woman had fallen in love at first sight with the Frenchman.

“You are quite right,” she said, “it is much nicer out of doors. Let us take a little walk in the garden;” and they strolled together through one or two old red courts and archways into the great garden that was at all seasons her joy and pride. The long borders were now bright with spring flowers, and the fruit-trees were in blossom; there was a humming of bees, and in some tall trees on the north the rooks were cawing.

“How English! How charming! I never saw a garden like this before!” exclaimed Gérard, enthusiastically; and for some minutes they walked on, talking about gardens.

It was Miss Mowbray’s favourite subject, and in her own garden she could very

easily forget every other. Presently, however, her visitor gently remarked that it was a pity Mr. and Mrs. Mowbray had left Cleeve Lodge.

“The whole family was so fond of it,” he said. “I remember their descriptions, and yesterday I went up the hill behind the house and saw the sea and the fir-trees. I really seemed to have seen them before. I had pictured them to myself so clearly. Was it a trial to them all, leaving their pleasant home?”

“Yes, I think so,” said Miss Mowbray. “At least, I don’t know that my nephew was very sorry. He has taken to writing books, and finds it convenient to be near London. He imagines that his books are going to make his fortune. I am afraid his wife is not quite so hopeful.”

“But surely his book on France will be very interesting?”

“Perhaps so; I don’t know,” said Miss Mowbray, with a slight shrug; and then recollecting herself, she made haste to add: “the subject, of course. I was thinking of his way of doing it. In France, are you very fond of books on England?”

“I think so. We most of us feel a great interest in England.”

“Is this your first visit to England?”

“Yes. I have long wished to come over, but Mr. Mowbray made the wish stronger. I have been hoping to meet him again, and to hear of the progress of that book.”

“You knew of the book, then?”

“He used to talk it over with me.”

“Well, I will write down his address for you, and you must go and see him,” said Miss Mowbray; then, after a moment’s hesitation, she added: “I am afraid he has had a good deal of trouble since you knew him. They used to be fairly well off, you

know ; now they are poor, through the breaking of an unfortunate bank. When I said he was hoping to make his fortune, I meant it very seriously. Not that you will find him changed—he is always hopeful and light-hearted ; I believe it weighs more on his wife than on him.”

“Poor Madame Mowbray !” murmured Gérard. “And his children ?”

“The children are no trouble to him ; they are all very well. The eldest boy is a good fellow, though I don’t like him much ; he is in an office in London.”

“Perhaps, then, it is better for Mr. and Mrs. Mowbray to live near London ; they are near all their children.”

“Yes, except their daughter ; they have Philip in the holidays,” said Miss Mowbray.

Then came an odd little pause. It brought a rare flash of caution to Miss Mowbray, a momentary wonder as to who

this man could be, how he came by the intimate knowledge of George and his family, for which she was giving him credit. Yet a quick glance seemed to make it impossible to distrust him, as he walked along grave and courteous beside her.

It was true that at that moment Gérard had a slight thrill of excitement ; but surely her instincts were not quick enough to tell her that. His dark face changed colour faintly, for he thought he was going to hear some news of Pauline now. Her home was not in London, then, it seemed. It would have been only natural for an old acquaintance to ask some question about her and her marriage. Gérard would gladly have done so, but the words would not come ; and the next minute, which changed Miss Mowbray's manner to him, made them impossible.

“ All this time,” she said, looking at him

a little more gravely than before, "you have not told me who you are, or where and when you knew my nephew."

"Forgive me; I ought to have told you at first," said Gérard. "My name is Maulévrier."

"Very stupid of me not to have thought of it," said Miss Mowbray, after another pause, which she really could not help.

She spoke honestly. She was astonished at herself for not having guessed the truth at once—for having been so blind, so deceived, as not to recognise the wretch who had spoilt her Pauline's peace—clouded the girl's brightness for life, she sometimes feared. How she had hated this young man! What could have brought him here?" Did he really want George's address, or had he found out by any means that Pauline was living with

her? Mr. Penny, the stupid vicar of Cleeve, had probably found time to give him that piece of information. What a blessing that Pauline was not coming back till the afternoon! In the meantime, how was this intruder to be got rid of?

Aunt Lucia was very much annoyed, and heartily sorry; for she had been really interested in the handsome stranger, and even now as she looked at him her foolish heart softened towards him. Dear me! this was indeed a dangerous rival for Ben!

Then, remembering Pauline's story, it occurred to her that this young man was to have married somebody else even so long ago as last summer. All the arrangements were made. Pauline had no doubt at all of his marrying her. Aunt Lucia could not recollect her name; but she now began to think that M. de Maulévrier must

be a villain indeed. What had he done with his poor young wife? Had he left her in France, and come here, presuming on the ignorance of Pauline and her people? This was almost too black a depth for Miss Mowbray to imagine or realise; but she faintly suspected it nevertheless, and the thought deepened her painful anxiety to get rid of such a wretch as soon as possible.

Yet she could not be rude or inhospitable, especially to a person who had entertained her relations so kindly in France; and, after all, perhaps he was more to be pitied than blamed. It was not much wonder that he should have fallen in love with Pauline, even if the customs of his country had arranged for him to marry somebody else. Still, he had behaved badly—the mildest judgment must allow that; and, whether he was married or not, his run-

ning after Pauline now was unjustifiable. Miss Mowbray was quite decided on one point: she must prevent their meeting if she could.

Gérard was sensitive enough to be aware of the sudden chill in her manner; the friendly ease which had delighted him disappeared all at once, much more evidently than Miss Mowbray intended. She changed the subject; she talked no more of her nephew and his children: she asked Gérard nothing about himself or his home; she made no allusion to the events of last year. Now that she knew his name he found himself treated as a stranger, and entertained with a little talk on politics.

He could not understand why this should be. Pauline was married; therefore she had not cared much for him. The attraction that had drawn them together had been far greater on his side than on

hers, as he had always thought. She had not suffered like him, but had recovered, and had been consoled, and had made some good comfortable marriage. If she, then, had forgotten last summer, why should any one else remember it? That madness, if they knew of it, was the only thing that could make him unwelcome to Pauline's relations; it was the only reason he could give himself for Miss Mowbray's coldness now. But he could have told her what was true—that he had come to England without any intention of seeking them out, and had only resolved on doing so after he had seen Pauline with her husband in the Park.

“If you will kindly give me Mr. Mowbray's address,” he said presently, “I think it is time for me to go.”

“How are you going?” said Miss Mowbray, looking up into an apple-tree.

“By train—back to your town, and then to London.”

“To London by the 3.50, I suppose. There is no train from here till two o’clock. You must stay and have luncheon with me.”

“No, thank you. Let me take a walk in the country. I do not wish—” began Gérard; but Miss Mowbray silenced him with one of her bright looks.

“That is not the way you would treat me, Monsieur de Maulévrier, if I called on you in France. You would not send me away to wander about the lanes till my train came.”

“But I am in your way.”

“Not at all. I am glad to see you, as I said before.”

Aunt Lucia now recollected herself, and checked the kind feelings, which, in spite of principle, would go forth to this young man.

“Come and look at my river,” she said, in a colder voice; “and I have a mill close by, which may interest you.”

Gérard walked with her all about her favourite precincts, and pleased her by his admiration of everything. He was really interested; the Court seemed to him a model English home, and all its surroundings delightful; its yards, its meadow, its rippling stream, the quiet, sheltered safety of the whole—all were, as he said, so English, such a contrast to his wild old Maulévrier.

Miss Mowbray liked him more and more every minute; she knew she was wrong, but she could not help it. It was with the greatest difficulty that she restrained her curiosity, and did not ask him plainly whether he was married, and if so, what had brought him to England. She was glad when the luncheon-bell rang, and it

was no longer necessary to stroll about under the trees entertaining him.

Neither of them alluded to the Mowbrays again till luncheon was over, when she wrote down her nephew's address and gave it to him.

"You will call upon them at Sandridge, then?" she said. "Soon, I suppose. To-morrow?"

"Very likely to-morrow," said Gérard.

"Do you think of staying long in England?"

"I hardly know. I think not. I do not think I shall stay here more than a few days."

"And then you are going back to France?"

"Yes; I suppose so," he said, doubtfully. "I may go to Biarritz; I may go into Spain. I am a wanderer for the present, madame, and I fear that, wherever

I go, I am not likely to meet with such a kind and charming welcome as yours again."

"O, not at all," said Miss Mowbray, colouring, and speaking in a hurried way.

She watched him from the drawing-room window as he walked away to the station.

"He is most remarkable, most remarkable," she frankly confessed to herself. "I certainly don't wonder. If I had been a girl, I should have been much worse than Pauline, poor dear. He did not ask for her; I don't think Mr. Penny can have told him she lived here. Perhaps he expects to find her at Sandridge, poor creature. He will look more dismal than ever when he is disappointed. For my part, I don't believe he is married; yet one never knows; those foreign husbands and wives are so odd. Dear me, I hope he won't meet Pauline at Cleeve station this

afternoon. Poor Ben! that would be dreadful. I think he has the finest eyes I ever saw."

She could not make up her mind whether to tell Pauline of his visit; she left this question to chance, which was sure to settle it for her. Her niece arrived, smiling and affectionate; she was more animated than usual, and Miss Mowbray did not at once find out that she was thin and pale.

It seemed that Pauline had quite enjoyed her afternoon at Cleeve; it had been a rest after the journey to walk up to the dear old Point, to see the old home, even from the outside, and to look out across the gleaming sea. Pauline spoke of Ben Dunstan's kindness in taking her there, frankly and naturally. Ben seemed to have made good use of his time, and to have told her all the Croome gossip, in

exchange for Sandridge news. Aunt Lucia listened with a smile, and a little secret surprise, as Mr. Dunstan's name found itself on Pauline's lips again and again.

She had asked him if she might have a class of village girls, a new idea for Pauline. He had smiled, probably knowing her better than she knew herself, and looking a little farther into the future; but she had made him talk it over seriously: he had owned that perhaps she might not do much harm, and now she wanted Aunt Lucia's leave to have it in the study at the Court.

"Wherever you like, my dear," said Aunt Lucia. "Won't you find it very teasing? but it will fill up your time a little. What put it into your head?"

"I don't know; it came there," said Pauline.

"Of course Ben laughed, horrid crea-

ture!" said Miss Mowbray. "He doesn't believe that women have souls—he said so one day; and I know he thinks they are not capable of teaching anybody, even each other. But, of course, as they haven't souls it does not matter; you can amuse yourself."

"He did not quite say that to me," said Pauline.

"No, he keeps his worst remarks for me; I'll do him the justice to say that," said Miss Mowbray. "Now tell me about your father and mother."

After dinner Pauline went into the conservatory, and looked round at the flowers; but Miss Mowbray, who was anxiously watching her from an armchair in the drawing-room, thought she was not much interested in them. Presently the girl came back, and, standing in the window, said rather dreamily,

“Aunt Lucia, such an odd thing happened!”

“Yes, dear child?”

“As we came down from the Point we met Mrs. Selwood, and she told us that a French gentleman had been walking about there yesterday afternoon, and had asked about papa, some one in the town had told him we were gone away. He asked Mrs. Selwood if she could give him papa’s address, but she couldn’t. I wonder who he could have been—don’t you?”

“Very odd,” said Aunt Lucia, taking up a large seed catalogue, and holding it studiously before her face.

For a few moments neither of them spoke. Pauline again looked vaguely at the flowers; but presently her aunt’s voice called her eyes and ears back.

“Have you any reasons to believe

that—that M. de Maulévrier ever married that girl you told me of?”

“No—I don’t know. How can I possibly tell? but I think it is most likely. Why?” said Pauline.

“He is a remarkably good-looking young man,” said Aunt Lucia after a moment, calmly and dispassionately.

Pauline came forward, and stood in the middle of the room, her cheeks flaming.

“He came here yesterday;” she said, in a low voice.

“Not yesterday, to-day. He stayed last night at Cleeve. Yes, he came this morning, and walked about the garden, and had luncheon with me, and went away at two o’clock, and is now on his way back to London. You did not catch sight of him, then, at the station?”

“No—O no! I never thought it possible. Do you think—” said Pauline, and she stopped short.

“I don’t think he knows you are living with me,” said her aunt, gravely. “Mr. Penny could not give him your father’s address, and sent him here. To tell the truth, dear child, he did not mention your name, or ask for you at all. Your father seemed to be his attraction.”

“So he was. Yes—I hope so,” said Pauline, in rather a confused way. “But who would have thought of his coming to England!”

Then she came and sat down by her aunt, pulled away the catalogue, and took hold of her hands.

“Tell me, dear, what did you think of him? How did you get on together?”

“Very badly,” said Aunt Lucia. “I

was nice to him at first; but when he told me his name I became very rude and disagreeable. He paid me compliments, and praised Croome as if it was paradise. I did not succeed in making him angry as I hoped. There was a good luncheon, but he wouldn't eat anything. I suppose he had had his breakfast at eleven o'clock, in that pagan way of theirs. I thought him one of the handsomest and most oppressive and absurd young men I ever saw. We shall hear more about him from Sandridge; he is going to call there to-morrow."

"And I came away to-day," murmured Pauline.

"Yes. Was it your good star or your evil star that made the arrangement? I think it was, perhaps your good star."

"Very likely," said the girl, quietly.

“But you need not be afraid. I am not so silly as I was last year.”

“I hope not. But if he is married, which seems quite possible, I pity his wife,” said Miss Mowbray, with some sharpness.

Pauline coloured, and did not say much more that evening.

She really did not know what she felt about Gérard’s coming to England, or how she ought to understand it. It was impossible to come to any conclusion about it at all.

She had quite refused that afternoon to recognise him in Mrs. Selwood’s description. Her father had many foreign acquaintances. It could not be Gérard. How could he leave his home and his mother and Françoise de Brye, who, most likely, was his wife by this time? By way of keeping herself in order, and driving him out of her thoughts, she

made an attempt to plunge herself into present interests, listened attentively to Ben, cheered him with her smiles, and, when he talked about the low moral tone of the people of Croome, was ready to suggest that she might help him by making friends with some of the girls. His confessing that she might not do much harm seemed a high compliment from a man of his opinions, and she liked the feeling that her useless idle days were coming to an end. Parish work, of a more exciting sort than carrying baskets to old women, would come in very usefully in filling up one's thoughts and days.

Perhaps it was not the highest motive, and certainly not an uncommon one; perhaps Mr. Dunstan understood it pretty well all the time; but Pauline did not take the trouble to examine

herself on the subject. To be useful, to be loved, to be well off, to be fenced from care and a bad conscience—all this suited Pauline very well for the present.

And now that she found her vague suspicion true, Gérard in England, her chief thought, in reality, was fear. Those weeks last summer had been more painful than anything in all her life before; even the happiness of them was pain. She felt she could never go through them again. Just as she was settling down into peace, and a sort of content, it would be almost too terrible to meet Gérard and lose it all.

Yet, as she stood at the window that night, and looked out across the silent moonlit spaces of the garden—a change, indeed, from the dull road of villas at Sandridge—Tourlyon bells began to ring in her ears, the river swept and

swirled under the bridge, carrying with it the splashing and laughter of the laveuses. She was walking again up the street with Gérard, under the old black nodding gables, with sunshine pouring down, and they were describing their homes to each other. She wondered if Gérard had remembered it, as he walked up yesterday under the pine-trees, and out to her favourite Point with its view over the gray sea. She could hear his voice now, saying,

“My home! It is a desert. You cannot imagine anything more lonely.”

Yes, he certainly had spoken the truth. Maulévrier was a desert, indeed.

“I wish I had never seen it. I wish I had never gone to France at all. Why should I have been made so miserable for nothing?” said Pauline to herself, rebelliously.

CHAPTER IV.

SANDRIDGE.

THOUGH Pauline, perhaps fortunately for herself, had seen nothing of Gérard that day at Cleeve, Fate had allowed him to have a glimpse of her.

Just as his train to London was passing slowly out of the station, she and Ben Dunstan were close to it, coming up the broad pathway with the sun full upon them. Gérard started forward in his carriage and stared at this apparition; it certainly was Pauline, who he had seen in the Park only the day before yesterday. Finding himself down at Cleeve had been strange enough; it was still more strange to see her there. Her aunt had not said

she was coming, but then he had not ventured to inquire for her. The man who was walking with her—Gérard looked at him with a vague feeling of recognition, perceiving that he was not her husband, but only, after some time, remembering that he was the man who had followed the Mowbrays to France with bad news, and had gone away with them from Maulévrier. These two were talking very cheerfully, and Pauline was even laughing. Gérard carried the sight of her smiling face all the way to town with him; for in an instant, the train had hurried on, a wall and some trees had come between, and she was hidden from him. That momentary glimpse was almost like a dream; and he asked himself many times afterwards whether it was really Pauline that he saw.

The next afternoon he went down to Sandridge. This was not a pretty or

fashionable suburb ; it had an atmosphere of bags and business, and was quite out of the way of society ; but it was cheap, and there was a healthy breeziness about it, the result of a high hill and a common, with gorse and fern and holly bushes, and broad sandy walks leading to an actual fir wood. This belonged to a rich man who had built his house on the edge of it, so that it was not in danger of being cut down at present. There were new roads and rows of houses in every direction from the station, and Monsieur de Maulévrier, coming out out and seeing no cabs—for they generally took a holiday on Saturday afternoon, not being vain enough to expect any strangers from London, and all the Sandridge people being at home—turned back to the ticket collector, and asked him the way to The Pines.

“The Pines ! Don’t know, sir, I’m sure,”

said the man, at the same moment receiving the tickets of a boy and girl, who had come down in Gérard's carriage from London.

"The house of Mr. Mowbray," said Gérard, looking hopelessly up and down the road. "Do not you know? Have you no cabs here?"

"Well, there's none just at present. I'm a stranger myself," said the ticket collector; and then he addressed the lad, who was just passing on, he and his companion having bestowed quick, curious glances on Gérard, which would have been hearty stares had not good manners forbidden it. Gérard looked pale and worn and wild; his dark eyes were hollow and sad; but his voice and manner were very agreeable, and impressed even the hard surface of an official. Of course he was evidently a foreigner; but being a perfectly well-bred one, he had no foreign exaggeration.

“Can you tell this gentleman, sir?” said the collector. “He wants to go to The Pines, Mr. Mowbray’s. Do you know whereabouts it is?”

“Yes; I am going that way myself,” said the boy. “We shall be glad to show you the way,” he added to Gérard, who bowed gratefully, glancing from him to the plain, bright, eager face of his sister.

“You want to see Mr. Mowbray?” said the lad, as they started off together.

“Yes; I have come down on purpose. Do you know him? Do you think I am likely to find him at home?”

“He is at home to-day. He won’t be far off, at any rate.”

“I had the pleasure of travelling down just now with you and mademoiselle,” said Gérard.

“Yes. My sister.”

“Ah—mademoiselle your sister!” with a

bow to the young girl, who coloured, and smiled, and looked the other way.

"The fact is," said her brother, bluntly, "Mr. Mowbray is our father, you know, so it's very easy for us to show you the way to The Pines."

"Is it possible? You astonish me!" said Gérard. "How very fortunate for me! But we must be friends, then, because your father is a great friend of mine."

"Is he? Well, I'm Philip Mowbray, and I suspect it was you they stayed with last summer."

"Yes, my name is Maulévrier."

"That's rather difficult for me," said Philip. "I can't talk French. But I am sure my father will be glad to see you, because he often talks about you, and since you saw him he has written a book about France."

"Ah, he was talking about it. And has

he fixed on the title yet? I understand the book is not published."

"No; the publishers are so tiresome. They want to make such a lot, you see, and to cut my father off with nothing. It's always the way."

"We have thought of a great many titles," Kitty joined in, "but I believe papa will stick to his own—*Royalty in Shadow*: what do you think of that? He has written a novel too, and the name of that is awfully troublesome. Fancy, one man suggested *Turrets and Tears*, because it was a tragical sort of story, and the scene was in a French château. It is so interesting. Shall you have time to look at it this afternoon?"

"I am afraid not," said Gérard, smiling at her. "I have not asked yet for Mrs. Mowbray. Is she quite well, and does the literary work agree with your father?"

"They are both pretty well, thanks," said Philip.

"I am not quite so neglectful as I seem, though," Gérard went on, "for I went down the day before yesterday to your old home, Cleeve, hoping to find you all there."

"I only wish you had," sighed Kitty.

"What did you do?" asked Philip.
"Come straight back again?"

"Not quite. In search of your father's address, I went on to Croome yesterday, and paid a visit to your most charming aunt there."

"O, Aunt Lucia!" they both said, half laughing.

"Then you saw my sister," said Kitty, "and she could tell you all about us."

"No, mademoiselle. I did not see your sister—except that I caught a glimpse of her from the carriage window, as I left

Cleeve Station yesterday afternoon. I was sorry to have missed her. I hope she is very well. Have you seen her lately ? ”

“ Oh, yes, she has been staying with us,” said Kitty. “ She was very ill last year, you know, but I think she is strong again now.”

The three had been walking together up a broad road, slightly rising from the station. On each side were villas and gay little gardens, and at the far end the road opened on the common, where it divided to the right and left, and the brown pleasant paths led on to the fir wood. Philip and Kitty, with their tall companion, turned into one of these villa-gardens, and the talk about Pauline came to a sudden end.

“ They will be surprised,” said Kitty, half to herself.

Philip opened the door with his latch-

key, walked on down the narrow hall, and threw open the drawing-room door at the end. It was a small room in which the old Cleeve furniture looked large and shabby ; but there was comfort and cheerfulness too, plenty of books, and a pleasant look-out down a sloping garden, and over other gardens beyond. The sun was shining in on Mrs. Mowbray, who sat in a low chair reading the newspaper.

“A friend of yours,” said Philip who would not venture on the Frenchman’s name ; and with no more announcement than this, Gérard came forward, a startling sight indeed to Mrs. Mowbray. She coloured, and so did he, as their eyes met ; but it was impossible to receive him with anything but hearty friendliness.

“Monsieur de Maulévrier ! this is a pleasure we did not at all expect,” said Mrs. Mowbray, smiling kindly at the young

man, who took the hand she held out and kissed it, Kitty staring fixedly in the background, and Philip breaking into a sort of rapture of grins.

After a moment these two young people went away to tell their father, and Mrs. Mowbray began to ask Gérard questions about his mother and his brothers and everybody she could think of in France. She was a good deal disturbed at his coming; being wiser than Aunt Lucia, she felt quite sure that he was not married, and that something had happened to break off his engagement. So much the better, she thought, both for him and for Mademoiselle de Brye; but she did not, for all that, like the idea of his having come to see Pauline. Her child's prospects were at present much too good to be spoilt by the intrusion of a Frenchman, however charming he might be. Aunt Lucia hated

foreigners, she had always said so ; and Mrs. Mowbray herself did not love them much. She had thought it a happy thing that the silly romance of last summer was passing out of Pauline's mind ; it really must not be renewed. Mrs. Mowbray felt thankful that Pauline had gone back to her aunt just in time to miss this troublesome visitor.

Gérard, meanwhile, did not seem particularly sentimental. He was rather cheerful and agreeable, for him ; he told her how he had come across her son and daughter at the station, and then he went on to astonish her with the account of his visit to Cleeve and Croome. Mrs. Mowbray, as she listened, began to think that Providence was certainly watching over Pauline.

"I am sure it was very good of you to take so much trouble to find us," she said,

rather sadly. "We feel quite buried here—at least I do. Mr. Mowbray goes to town almost every day. The place is extremely dull, but it is healthy for the children."

"I did not like to be in England without seeing you and Mr. Mowbray," said Gérard. "He so kindly wished me to come when he was with us last year. I am glad to find, madame, that you have not forgotten me."

"That was not likely," said Mrs. Mowbray. "Have you been in England long?"

"Only three or four days. To tell you the truth, madame, I came intending to be quite solitary. I should have visited London and gone back to France, most likely, without making any attempt to find my friends. But three days ago I was in the Park one morning, and I accidentally

saw—in fact, I saw your daughter there, and I perceived—”

“Oh—yes,” said Mrs. Mowbray, trying not to show her vexation; “I see; but did you speak to her? she did not tell me.”

“No, she did not see me, and I would not intrude myself,” said Gérard, gravely.

“But after that I thought I might be allowed to pay you a visit. May I hope that she is well and happy, and that you are contented?”

“Yes, thank you; she is very well,” said Mrs. Mowbray.

“She must be a sad loss to you, and to her brothers and sisters.”

“Yes; but it is better for her, on the whole.” Pauline’s mother reflected that of course Aunt Lucia, in her absurd openness, had talked to him by the hour about Pauline; and then the question occurred

to her, Could Aunt Lucia possibly have liked him, in spite of his birth? She did not quite understand how Gérard had argued his case just now, but she put that down to the confusion of her own brains.

“Ah! no doubt,” said Gérard, with something like a sigh. “I saw her again yesterday at Cleeve Station—my train was just going out: she did not see me. She looked laughing and beautiful.”

At this moment Mr. Mowbray came into the room. If his wife was changed and aged by trouble, he certainly was not. He welcomed Gérard warmly and affectionately, and after they had talked for some time about France, about London, about books, he began asking the young man questions about himself.

Mr. Mowbray was not a man of regrets; he lived and was enthusiastic in the

present, and his only remark when he heard of Gérard's visit to the West was, "What a pity you should have wasted your time in running down there! Well, I want to know what you have been doing lately at Maulévrier."

"The old answer, monsieur—nothing," said Gérard, in his quiet, resigned way.

"For shame!" said Mr. Mowbray, laughing. "Nothing at all! And your brothers? I don't suppose they would have the same sad account to give of themselves. What are they doing? Did your brother Victor go to Africa? He told me it was likely."

"O no! Victor has left the army; he is married. I thought you must know," said Gérard, slightly confused.

"How should I have known?" said Mr. Mowbray. "You never told me anything about it. Some one told us last

year that it was you, and not any of your brothers who were likely to marry."

Gérard looked steadily at his hat. He seemed a little uncomfortable, and Mrs. Mowbray frowned at her husband; she thought the young man ought not to be cross-questioned in this way. But Gérard was not angry; he raised his eyes after a moment, and smiled. Mr. and Mrs. Mowbray could not know all, he thought; they could not know the full badness of his behaviour last summer, or they would not have welcomed him so kindly; and, after all, now that she was married, nothing mattered very much.

"It was intended that I should marry," he said. "Only one of us could afford it; we made a family arrangement. I believe these things are not known in England. For various reasons we altered our plans, and Victor took my place."

“And who did he marry? Any one we have met?” asked Mrs. Mowbray.

“Yes, madame; you met her at Tourlyon—Mademoiselle de Brye.”

“O, indeed!”

The idea of this transfer was almost too much for Mrs. Mowbray, and she left any further questions to her husband. She looked out of the window, and reflected that the young man could not now have any hope of winning Pauline. He had nothing, and, as far as he knew, Pauline was as poor as himself. At any rate, his first seeking them out must have been without any views of the kind, though there was no knowing what encouragement Aunt Lucia might have given him. She vaguely heard the talk going on, Gérard telling Mr. Mowbray that his brother and his wife had been spending the winter in Paris, but that they were

coming to Maulévrier for a little time in the summer.

Then a dark young man with a book in his hand came strolling up the garden path, and, approaching the window, glanced up in surprise at the foreign-looking stranger.

"Come in, Ralph," said his father, as he slowly mounted the steps to the window.

"You have heard of Monsieur de Maulévrier. My eldest son," he added to Gérard.

This affectionate familiar way of speaking was just like Mr. Mowbray, Gérard thought. He, no doubt, liked this man very much, and was a charming father-in-law. But that did not give the man any claim on Gérard's friendship. He bowed stiffly to Ralph, who, on his side, was not effusive. Mr. Mowbray lifted his eyebrows in surprise and vexation, and after-

wards reproached Ralph with his horrid manners.

“Because a man is a Frenchman, Ralph,” he said, “you need not behave to him as if he was a Turk.”

“Turk! I like Turks,” said Ralph. “But I can’t stand those stuck-up fellows. And he looked at me as if I was a German.”

Philip and Kitty agreed with their father that it must have been Ralph’s own fault, for Monsieur de Maulévrier was as jolly as possible when he walked with them from the station. Anyhow, for some reason, the entrance of Ralph made a great change in Gérard. He stood up, looking pale and proud, and began saying good-bye to Mrs. Mowbray.

“You are not going yet,” Mr. Mowbray remonstrated. “Stay and dine with us; or if you can’t stay to-day, come to-morrow.”

“Yes, do; we shall be so glad,” said his wife.

But Gérard would not accept the invitation. He was not sure of being in town; he thought he was engaged. Mrs. Mowbray, perhaps, thinking of her cook’s uncertainties, was not so very sorry.

Mr. Mowbray walked down with the young man to the station. As soon as they were out of the house Gérard recovered himself; and he ended by giving Mr. Mowbray the name of his hotel, and begged him to come and see him, which his friend promised to do.

CHAPTER V.

CASTLES.

ON Monday Mr. Mowbray had a note from Gérard, asking him to dine with him that evening at his hotel. He went, though a little puzzled by the young man's having refused his invitations. Ralph said it was all the confounded airs of a beggarly Frenchman, who thought himself somebody; but Ralph found no one to agree with him, not even Philip, whose dislike of foreigners was generally stronger than his own. Mr. Mowbray said that Gérard de Maulévrier was a thoroughly good fellow, and had never given himself airs in his life.

"Why, father, he's airs all over," said

Ralph. "Who ever saw an ordinary man look like that?"

"He is not an ordinary man; there you are right," said Mr. Mowbray; and he went off to London to dine with Gérard.

These two were born companions; they were never at a loss for something to talk about. Mr. Mowbray, of course, was much the greatest talker of the two; but he found in Gérard a person capable of listening to all his ideas, and of sympathising, even if he did not thoroughly understand.

"You shall look over the manuscript. I have it at home," said Mr. Mowbray, talking of one of his attempts. "You had better come down to-morrow. Come at four or five o'clock, and stay to dinner."

Gérard hesitated again, and Mr. Mowbray looked at him curiously; for he had told him not long before that he had no

friends in London. He did not press him just then, however. Presently, after a little more talk about the manuscript, Gérard asked, in a careless sort of way,

“Is your son-in-law with you still? Does he take an interest in these things?”

“My son-in-law?” repeated Mr. Mowbray.

“I do not know his name,” said Gérard—I have not asked; and the other day you called him, I think, by a Christian name. But I see by your face he does not care for books,” he added, smiling.

“My dear fellow,” said Mr. Mowbray, “I don’t know what you are talking about. My son-in-law? Have you met a man who calls himself my son-in-law? What on earth do you mean?”

“It is not possible that I am mistaken,” said Gérard, fixing his eyes on Mr. Mowbray’s astonished face. “The husband of

your daughter. The gentleman you introduced to me as your eldest son. I understood—it was your amiable way of speaking. And I knew him by sight. I had seen him in the Park with her, as I told Madame Mowbray, before I went down to Cleeve. I should perhaps, be less confused if I knew his name.”

“I see,” said Mr. Mowbray, who had now collected his ideas. “Nobody had told you, then, that my daughter was married. You saw her with that young fellow in the Park, and drew your own conclusion.”

“Well, I am not very clever in English customs; but surely it was a natural conclusion?”

“Perhaps it was, from your point of view,” said Mr. Mowbray, looking at Gérard with a smile.

The young man got up from his chair,

and walked across to the fireplace. He stood there with his head bent, thoughtfully looking on the floor. Mr. Mowbray watched him with amused eyes.

“Am I to understand—” Gérard began at last.

“That girls in England are allowed to go out with their brothers?”

“It was her brother, then! That young man is your son?”

“My eldest boy.”

“Ah! Then forgive my asking. I have entirely deceived myself, it seems. Perhaps Mademoiselle Mowbray is not married after all?”

“She certainly was not married three days ago, when she went down to Somersetshire.”

“Then her home is still with you?”

“I think so,” said Pauline’s father.

“But I believe my aunt, who you saw

the other day, is of a different opinion. She took possession of my daughter last autumn, and does not seem inclined to give her up. Mrs. Mowbray is resigned, and therefore I have no alternative. You will find some day, my friend, that all the arrangements in life are made by women."

"They have a great deal of good sense," said Gérard, quietly.

"Almost too much, I sometimes think," said Mr. Mowbray.

He now found his young host rather dreamy and absent, and not quite so intelligent on literary subjects as he had been earlier in the evening. He was himself much amused and interested by Gérard's mistake about Pauline, and many ideas went racing each other through his active brain. To begin with, it would be a fine story to tell his wife, though

he resolved, with unnatural prudence, that it should go no further. Ralph certainly should not know why the Marquis de Maulévrier had looked at him "as if he was a German."

Mr. Mowbray was a good deal touched; he had a great fancy for Gérard, and, in fact, he gave him more credit than he deserved, for he now felt sure that the new arrangement at Maulévrier, which made Victor the head of the house, was entirely owing to Gérard's hopeless love for Pauline. His wife had hinted to him, as a partial explanation of Pauline's low spirits in the autumn, that the young people had been inclined to like each other. He had laughed then; but Gérard's manner now showed him that she was probably right. Like her, he thought to himself that the affair was hopeless, Gérard, of course, having

nothing—unless Aunt Lucia— But he knew in his heart that Aunt Lucia would be a foolish old woman if she did anything of the kind. Even if she meant—and he thought that likely enough—to leave everything to Pauline in the end, she might easily live twenty years more. Immortal youth seemed to belong to a creature like her. Gérard and Pauline could not marry in hope of her inheritance, and pay their bills with hope for twenty years. The idea was nonsensical: and nobody had any right to expect that she would make Pauline an allowance sufficient for them to live upon. A regular organised generosity like this was the last thing to be expected from Aunt Lucia, even if she thought such a marriage a good thing for Pauline; and no doubt all the common sense she had would tell her

that the girl would be much better and happier married to a steady solvent Englishman. Yet Pauline's father, as he went back to Sandridge that night, amused himself with dreaming strange dreams about her.

Before leaving Gérard, he had renewed his invitation to him for the next day, which was instantly and cordially accepted. It was laughable to think that Ralph had been the innocent obstacle.

In the next few days Gérard and his friends met constantly. Then Mrs. Mowbray asked him to stay a week with them, and he came and was established as an intimate friend in the little house at Sandridge. She had been rather unwilling to give this invitation; but her husband wished it so strongly, and talked so much about repaying Gérard's hospitality, and showing him something of

English life—the children, too, thought it such a fine holiday amusement—that she was obliged to consent, and to hide her own anxieties. It would have been all very well to entertain the young man at Cleeve Lodge—but here! Mrs. Mowbray felt the change more acutely than any of them, and with all her strength of mind was very sensitive. She did not feel familiar enough with Gérard to treat him like one of her own boys; Mr. Mowbray's easy intimacy with him always surprised her a little; she could hardly believe, though Mr. Mowbray laughed at her, that a man whose home was Maulévrier did not find the Sandridge villa too dreadful a contrast.

Still, Gérard seemed quite happy in his quiet way; the whole household liked him; even Ralph came round and confessed that his airs wore off on fur-

ther acquaintance. Mr. Mowbray took him to see publishers and editors, and showed him London in all its aspects. The weather was beautiful, and they made expeditions to everything worth seeing in the neighbourhood. Little delicate George went about hanging to the Frenchman's arm, and Kitty, full of chatter, marched on his other side. Pauline, of course, was often mentioned, but never by him; and his grave listening face did not change when they talked of her.

So the week passed, and Gérard was fulfilling his old wish of seeing English life, which he had always fancied so pleasant. Of course it was life on a small scale as far as outward show and extra comfort went; but Gérard was a man of simple tastes—he had not been brought up luxuriously; and as to the tone of

life in Mr. Mowbray's household, he perceived, and quite rightly, that it could not anywhere have been higher or more refined. He saw no selfishness, no worldliness, no strain after appearances. He would have been surprised to hear that Pauline, the last visitor, had found it all unbearably dismal and depressing; but then he had never lived with them at Cleeve, and women have quicker senses than men, and can hear the hinges creak sometimes, no matter how carefully they are oiled.

On Gérard's last evening, he was sitting up late with Mr. Mowbray over his study fire, when his friend asked him what his plans were.

"I must go back to France," said Gérard; and then he sighed.

"You have not been so very long in England," said Mr. Mowbray.

“Long enough to admire her even more than I did before. But if one cannot stay always, it is best not to stay too long.”

Mr. Mowbray looked at him smiling.

“Do you mean that you would like to stay always?”

“No; I am not such a bad Frenchman as that,” said Gérard, recollecting himself. “But England has a very great charm for me, and it grows stronger every day. It is best not to be under a charm.”

“That is true,” said Mr. Mowbray.

A few hours before, he had come into the drawing-room, and found Gérard in a low chair beside Mrs. Mowbray’s work-table—she was not in the room—gazing at a pretty photograph of Pauline which always stood there. He had started up a little confused, and had begun to ask questions about something; but Mr. Mow-

bray, like other absent people, noticed things very keenly when he noticed them at all. He was more amused and interested than surprised, therefore, when that evening, after being much more dreamy than usual, and talking in this rather enthusiastic way about England, Gérard presently began to make his confession—a hopeless and useless one, as he knew; but it seemed as if he could not keep it back any longer.

“You have been very good to me, monsieur,” he said; “you are one of the few friends I have. I should like to tell you my history.”

“Go on,” said Mr. Mowbray. “It is not the first time that we have railed on Fate together.”

“I am not asking anything,” said Gérard—“I have not the right or the power; and I know it is no use railing. But I

have a great trouble, and I should like you to know it."

"I think I have guessed it, my dear fellow," said Mr. Mowbray. "I am sorry for you. I suppose that explains your abdicating in favour of Victor?"

Gérard coloured, and hesitated. It seemed impossible to explain to Pauline's father that the breaking off was not his own doing, but Mademoiselle de Brye's.

"I could not displease my mother and all the family," he muttered.

Probably any man but Mr. Mowbray would have seen more than a suspicion of weakness about his look and manner, and would have lost patience with him; but Mr. Mowbray was thoroughly fond of him, and understood French feeling quite well enough to enter into his difficulties.

"No," he said; "your mother would

not willingly have given you up to an Englishwoman."

"It was as hopeless last year as it is now," said Gérard.

"I am sorry," Mr. Mowbray repeated. "Let me ask—did my daughter know anything of it?"

"I could not help showing her one day. It was wrong, I know; but I had put a great restraint on myself, and this was at the last, when you were all going away. I thought she was sorry to go, and at the moment I could not bear parting with her."

"And you think she—" Mr. Mowbray began, and checked himself.

"O yes, certainly—then," Gérard answered, with a sudden bright look. "The other day, when I thought she was married, I supposed she had forgotten everything."

“It would not have been wonderful if she had,” said Mr. Mowbray, gravely. “In fact, it was her duty; and you ought not to have said a word, Gérard, for, if I understand things rightly, you were engaged at the time. If Pauline had told me, I should have been in a rage.”

“Yes, you would have been right. I had no excuse, except one,” said Gérard. “But I am not engaged now.”

Mr. Mowbray stroked his face thoughtfully, perhaps to hide a smile, for to his mind there was something comic, as well as touching, in all this. Gérard was so boyish in his confidence; he seemed to have such perfect faith in his friend's indulgence, while his friend saw more clearly every moment that he ought to be angry with him. The whole thing was so silly, provoking, and sad, that any man but Mr. Mowbray would have lost his

temper, and at least mentally called Gérard names. To this amiable philosopher he was a study of French sentiment: besides which, he really loved the melancholy fellow, with his handsome face and gentle ways. He could not realise the badness of his conduct in making unauthorised love to Pauline. It may seem unnatural in more ways than one, but Pauline's father, living in the present, had actually more sympathy at that moment with Gérard than with Pauline.

"I am glad to hear that you are not engaged now," he said, after a pause—"for your own sake, that is. I am afraid it makes no difference to anybody else. I understand, don't I, that you have given up everything to your brother? Excuse plain language."

"You are right, monsieur," said Gérard, dismally. "So I had better go back to

France, and forget. If I had not seen her at all, it would have been easier."

"You must screw up your courage. Very few things are easy ; but resolution is a splendid doctor, and so is time."

"Ah, yes," said Gérard. "Suppose I had been free, and had been able to come to you and ask you, would you have consented ? "

"It is possible that I might," said Mr. Mowbray. "The different country is a drawback, you know, for one's daughter, and so is the religion. Mrs. Mowbray, I think, would have seen those things more strongly than I should. There is my aunt, too ; and I can tell you that Pauline would depend much more on her consent than on mine or her mother's."

"Miss Mowbray seems a most charming person," said Gérard.

"Yes, but she is a whimsical person. I

am glad she made herself pleasant to you."

Gérard could honestly say that Miss Mowbray had made herself very pleasant to him. There had been things in her manner that puzzled him; but if she was whimsical, that perhaps explained them; and, at any rate, it was not necessary to tell Mr. Mowbray that he feared she had some prejudice against his name.

They talked a little about Croome. The place where Pauline lived was the most interesting place on earth; and now that Gérard was allowed to speak of Pauline, he cared for no other subject. Presently Mr. Mowbray told him in plain words that he expected his aunt to leave everything to Pauline. Of course he could not speak positively; but she had, to all intents and purposes, adopted the girl; she was fonder of her than of anybody; she knew that

Pauline's parents would have nothing, less than nothing, to give her. Mr. Mowbray, most sanguine of men, would be very much surprised if Croome Court did not someday belong to Pauline.

"But the man who marries her will have to live there at least part of the year, I suppose," said Mr. Mowbray, staring into the fire. As Gérard made no response, he presently glanced at him, and added: "A man, for instance, with all his interests in France might not care for that condition."

"On the contrary," exclaimed Gérard, flushing crimson. "Do you mean, monsieur—you cannot mean—"

"Be quiet ; don't excite yourself. I am only talking of chances and possibilities," said Mr. Mowbray. "My aunt is not an old woman ; I hope she may live at least five-and-twenty years more.

For that time Pauline will have nothing at all of her own, and your fortune, my friend, is the same as hers."

"Yes, yes, it is hopeless."

"Unless—if Pauline liked you — Miss Mowbray might take it into her head to make you both happy by settling a yearly income upon her. She might do it very well, if she chose, but I don't at all undertake to say that she will."

"I would live always in England to please her," murmured Gérard.

"Are not you reckoning without Madame de Maulévrier? But we have talked enough of nonsense; let us be plain and businesslike. You are going back to France, you say? You shall go. I will run down to Croome by and by, and talk things over with my aunt. If I have any good news I will write it to you. You will lay it before your mother,

get her consent, and then—come and see us again. You will write to me, and tell me your intentions, when you have come to a clear agreement with your mother. That is the right way of doing things, I think. Now, good-night.”

“How am I to thank you!” exclaimed Gérard.

“Wait my dear fellow. At present il n’y a pas de quoi.”

It may be expected that Mr. Mowbray’s heart misgave him a little as to the wisdom of all this encouragement. For he told Mrs. Mowbray nothing about it till the next evening, when Gérard was gone, and then was rather angry at her surprise and consternation. She did not think it at all a happy fate for Pauline to marry the Marquis, who of course would never live in England, at least while his mother was alive; she was not at all sure that

Pauline cared about him now, though she had liked him a little last summer.

"He thought she liked him a good deal," said Mr. Mowbray.

"He had no business to think so. She had too much sense. She would have told me," said Mrs. Mowbray, much disturbed. "However, I am sure Aunt Lucia will agree with me that a comfortable English marriage will be far the best thing for Pauline, and of course all your fine plans depend entirely on her."

"Entirely," said Mr. Mowbray, relapsing into good humour. "I told Maulévrier that, and if Polly doesn't care for him, that settles the question. But it would be a splendid match for him, poor fellow. I don't like to think of such a nice fellow being shelved in that heartless unnatural way—all because of Polly, too."

"It is rather sad, but we can't help

those French customs. It seems to me you think of the advantages for him, more than the disadvantages for Polly."

"That, my dear, is because I am an altruist."

"I never should have believed," said Mrs. Mowbray, thoughtfully, "that the young man would have had strength of mind to fight it out with his mother, and to break off that engagement. Madame de Maulévrier adored him, and I know it must have been a horrid trial to her to make that disagreeable Victor the eldest son. It is a strange affair altogether; but I cannot say I wish Pauline to marry him, and I think you had much better have let it alone."

"Ah, you would have listened to him in stony silence, no doubt. Women are so hard-hearted," said Mr. Mowbray.

"Men are such geese," replied his wife.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RECTOR OF CROOME.

MR. DUNSTAN, of course, did not in the least believe that Monsieur de Maulévrier had come to Croome simply to ask Miss Mowbray for her nephew's address. That idea was rather too amusing. Not that he mentioned any other possible motive to Miss Mowbray; but he was angry and rude when she told him of the Frenchman's visit, and laughed offensively when she said she had not been civil to him. Miss Mowbray, for once, was a little impatient with her friend Ben, and remarked that in order to meet with thoroughly narrow-minded prejudice it was not at all necessary to cross the Channel.

“Your admiring foreigners is a new thing,” said Ben. “But women are all alike. A tall fellow with a long nose, who makes bows to you—there you have your model. So good-looking! such charming manners! What do his morals, or his language, or anything else, signify?”

“Go away, please. You are envious and stupid, and I am tired of your nonsense,” said Miss Mowbray.

Ben went away, very anxious and miserable in his mind. He showed his feelings during the next few days by being defiant and rude to everybody except Pauline. In her presence he was silent and much more subdued than before, watching her with a half-hidden wistfulness. One may suspect that she understood his feelings; for, though the smiles of her first return died away, and she did not chatter to him any more, there

was a certain softness in her manner to him, an uncertainty, a kind of regret. Pauline was just then in suspense, not unnaturally wondering what was to become of her; and Ben went in and out like a faithful dog, ready to fetch and carry for her. He thought she liked him better than in the autumn; that day at Cleeve he even began to hope a little again. And then to come back to Croome and hear that the Frenchman was prowling about England! it would have been too much for the mildest temper. Ben brooded over it day and night; and every time he went to the Court he expected to find Gérard there, or to hear that he was coming. When he met Pauline in the lanes, he looked beyond her to see if there was a black shadow following. But the dreaded rival did not come; he heard no more of him.

In truth, Pauline hardly knew what she wished at this time; she dared not have any wish or hope connected with Gérard. She almost feared and shrank from the thought of him. It now seemed to her that she was born for a quiet easy life, not for romance. Romance was pain and foolishness. She could never give Gérard half as much as he would expect from her. Yet there were moments when she knew, poor child, having a heart able to speak the truth sometimes, that the joy of seeing him again would be almost madness.

Then prudence stepped in, and reminded her that if he had not come, she would have resigned herself quietly and taken life on a lower and more prosaic level. Much safer, much better, much happier in the end, said common sense; but, just at present, the balance of Pauline's mind was

disturbed, and she felt that all depended on one thing—what would Gérard do?

In one way, his behaviour was certainly strange. He had not mentioned her name to her aunt; and now he did not seem to have any idea of trying to see her, for, to her great amazement, she heard of his staying at Sandridge—staying on day after day in the little house that Pauline thought so sad, liked by everybody, a dear friend of the children, going about everywhere with her father. And yet there came no message, no hint of another visit to Croome. He was happy with them all; he might, as far as appearances went, have forgotten that she existed and belonged to them. Her mother wrote of him quite openly and naturally, as if he was any other visitor, and told her, as a little piece of ordinary gossip, of Victor's marriage to Mademoiselle de Brye. This was good news to

Pauline, and yet she hardly knew why. How could it matter to her? It only meant, as she very well knew, that Gérard must be a hermit for the rest of his days. Still she thought he might somehow have shown a little remembrance of her. She concluded that he had really forgotten her ; he *must* have forgotten her, or his feelings must have changed almost miraculously, or surely he could not be so happy among her people without her. Pauline remembered the photograph on her mother's work-table, and wondered if he ever looked at it. Thus she teased herself and scolded herself, and waited in puzzled suspense. Then there came a letter from Kitty, full of lamentations over his going away. He had left them the day before, and they all missed him so much ; but he was obliged to go back to France. Kitty and Philip had never thought they could have liked a Frenchman.

Very well; this was the end. Pauline was now filled with disgust and shame at having allowed herself to think of him at all. She now determined to put him out of her thoughts at once and for ever, and evidently the best way of doing this was to plunge herself into other interests. There must be no more thinking. A violent course of gaiety would have been the best antidote; but this was not to be had at Croome; she must therefore make the most of such small excitements as presented themselves.

She went out that afternoon, with a heart-ache which she would not acknowledge to herself, and which had the outward effect of flushing her cheeks with lovely colour, and giving a blue deep look to her eyes.

“How pretty you are to day, child!” said Miss Mowbray, meeting her in the garden.

“Am I? I thought you didn’t like this hat,” said Pauline, kissing her.

“The hat doesn’t seem to matter.”

She left her aunt among the flowers, and walked restlessly away, up into the rocky lanes and across high fields, where lambs were playing in the fresh spring weather. She was going to try and collect a few girls for that class, which seemed a possible distraction. She hardly knew what she was going to teach them, and neither Aunt Lucia nor Ben was likely to help her. Being intellectually lazy, she had put off this consideration for the present: one must find out first what they knew. Ben had been discouraging, though she did not mind him much at the time.

“Religion! explaining the Bible!” he had said, with a smile. “Do you understand it yourself? Better teach them to sew and knit, and darn the boys’ socks.”

“O, of course, anything to make them useful to the boys,” she had answered, laughing; but she did not at all intend to take his advice.

Her class was to be much more lively and interesting than he imagined. Besides, though she did not tell the Rector so, sewing and knitting and darning were not such very familiar industries to her.

She walked on till the fields opened out on a disused quarry; the stones lay about, half covered with moss, and a wild little stream dashed down amongst them, hurrying past the steep bank of a cottage-garden, where a row of nut-trees hung over the water. The cottage was large, thatched, and roughly built of refuse stones from the quarry; its roof was overgrown with house-leek, its walls were yellow with lichen, and in every cranny some weed or little fern was growing; so that they were like

natural rocks, picturesque and rugged. One had to cross the stream by a narrow plank, which led to the stony path up to the door. A small dog came out, and barked fiercely. Pauline, however, made her way past these obstacles, and reached the door, which was standing half open. Seeing that there were people in the kitchen, she knocked quite gently; a middle-aged woman, worn and gray, with tears on her face, stepped softly across the stone floor to let her in.

“Sit ye down, miss,” she whispered.

There was such a strange hush over the kitchen that Pauline was startled, and hardly liked to speak. In the large low room, with its immense chimney, five or six women were sitting, young and old; among them one very old woman, the grandmother, in a high armchair by the fire, and the two girls of whom Pauline was in search.

Their mother and a couple of neighbours made up the number. One of the girls had a fine earnest face, and hardly turned her sad dark eyes towards the bright vision of the young lady coming in ; the other was pretty and vacant-looking, and quite ready to stare. Pauline sat down silently in the chair that was set for her, and after a moment understood what was going on.

A few days before Mr. Dunstan had asked her aunt to send some help to these people ; the father had been for some time ill and out of work ; they were very poor, and too proud to beg for themselves. The request on Mr. Dunstan's part was so unusual, and his interest in the people was so evident, that Miss Mowbray asked for a little more explanation. She found that the man was an infidel ; that he had once attended some infidel and Communistic lectures in London, and since then had

preached his opinions a good deal among his neighbours at Croome.

“And I am to waste my charity on an unbelieving wretch like that!” cried Miss Mowbray.

“I want your help in making a Christian of him,” said Ben, gravely. “Example is better than precept; you may have heard that before.”

“After all, it is such a rare pleasure to hear you ask for anything, or confess that you have any work to do at Croome—I suppose I must encourage your infidel,” said his patroness, lightly.

Pauline remembered all this, as she sat down among the women and heard Ben Dunstan’s voice in an inner room, of which the door was standing open. He was talking; he and his parishioner were in the midst of a long argument on Christianity. The sick man’s remarks and

answers were like faint growls in the distance, but Ben, though he did not speak loud, spoke very clearly, and the listeners in the kitchen did not lose a word of what he was saying.

Pauline was a little bored at first, by finding herself thus hindered in her mission; but she could not help listening like the others, and very soon she found herself as deeply interested as they were. She knew nothing of the hollow clap-trap arguments which Ben was so easily defeating; they had not been dinned into her ears by profanity, ignorance, and stupidity for many months past, as they had been into the ears of these poor women; thus it was not the talk itself, though strange and new to her, that she found so interesting. It was the things which Ben said, and the way in which he said them. He did not

preach, he talked; he used all kinds of original illustrations, the quaintness of some of them making Pauline quite sure that they came out of his own head. Sometimes she felt inclined to smile, but among those grave faces this seemed impossible. And their gravity, after all, touched an answering chord in her heart. Yes; Ben was worth listening to; there was a strong earnest conviction in every word he said; a firmness, a fine quiet faith that could be shaken by nothing. He knew that good must triumph; that this man must believe in time; and he did not talk to him as an enemy, but as a brother who, by some strange misfortune, had lost sight of his father and his home.

As the talk went on, the sick man's replies grew fainter, and Ben's voice grew lower and more tender, and full

of sympathy. The women in the other room nodded their heads and wiped their eyes; the elder girl sat in unchanged gravity; the younger one kept gazing dreamily at Pauline, who was looking at the door. Presently there was a silence, and Ben came and shut the door, without seeing who was in the kitchen. Still Pauline felt that she must wait till he was gone, for these people seemed full of their own thoughts, and of what was going on in the next room. She waited, therefore, sitting still; the younger girl got up yawning, and went out into the garden; her mother sent a reproachful look after her.

In a few minutes Ben came out of the room, shutting the door after him.

“I shall be here again to-morrow, Mrs. Lyne,” he said.

“God bless you, sir!” said the mother.

At that moment Ben saw Pauline, who got up from her chair in the shadow.

“You here!” he said; and the sturdy Rector flushed a little. “Have you been here long?”

“A little time,” said Pauline. “I came to talk about—to tell Mrs. Lyne about the class, you know.”

“That is Mary’s business,” said the Rector; and the dark-eyed girl looked up wonderingly. “But you can’t talk to her now, for her father wants her. I think you had better come another day.”

“Very well; yes, I will,” said Pauline. And so Ben took her away with him from the cottage, over the plank, down the rough quarry road, and across the upland fields.

“Were you there all the time?” he said presently.

“Most of it. I heard you talking. I

suppose you did not hear me come in?"

"No, I must confess I did not. I'm afraid that poor chap will die," said Ben.

"Still, you are not very unhappy about him, are you?" said Pauline.

"At least, I am sure you are doing all you can for him."

"It rouses one when a fellow is such a fool as to deny everything," he said, looking at her with a slight smile. "You hardly know what you are saying sometimes. I wish I had known you were there—and yet I'm glad I didn't."

"It would not have made any difference to you," said Pauline. "You meant all that, and you said it all. I am very glad I was there, and heard it. It taught me something too."

"Why, you don't mean to say that such thoughts ever plague you!" said

Ben. "I know what they are by experience. I worked them off at Forest Moor."

"Have I soul enough, do you think, to be troubled in that way?"

"Don't talk like your aunt," said Ben. "Seriously, though—my argument with Lyne—what did it teach you?"

"I shall not tell you that," she answered, gently.

She could not exactly say, "It taught me how good and how clever you are."

But this little adventure, this hearing him at his best, when he did not know that any educated ears were listening, had really a great effect upon her. It influenced her after life, as such discoveries do; accidental, we call them, if anything is an accident. Pauline had many faults, some of them not of a high kind; but she had what is a redeeming

point in any character, a strong faculty of admiration. She could look up; she could admire power and talent and goodness; she was not at all exclusively employed in admiring herself, like some girls with beautiful faces. Poor Pauline! She talked to Ben brightly and gently enough, as they walked over the fields together. She was restless and unhappy and angry at heart, but no one would have found this out from her manner. Ben thought she had never been so charming. He was beginning to despise himself for being afraid of the Frenchman; the facts, which he had heard from Miss Mowbray, of Gérard's staying at Sandridge, of his going back to France, had been a source of comfort to him; and to-day Pauline's sweetness, with her lovely looks—he had not seen her look so pretty for months, if ever before—filled the excellent Ben

with a brave excitement. He believed she liked him, and he was afraid of nobody.

They came down the slope of the fields, and reached a stream that ran in the hollow, below the church and rectory. Looking over its low gray parapet half covered with reddish ivy, through a gap in the willows that shaded it, whose catkins were just breaking into fresh green leaf, they could see the old red chimneys of the Court, far away along the meadows. This was the same small river that turned the mill; its next bridge above was close to the Court gates, and its clear brown current came singing down from Aunt Lucia to them as they stood on the rough pathway and looked up the stream.

“You know that Miss Mowbray is going to leave all this to me?” said Ben, suddenly.

“Yes, she told me. I am very glad,” answered Pauline.

“Do you suppose everybody knows?”

“O no, I don’t think so. Nobody, I believe, except Mr. Johnson and I.”

“It is best that they should not, for of course she may change her mind. Sometimes I wish she would, for I don’t know what I shall do with it all. However, that is a long way off,” said Ben, comforting himself. “She thinks I am the right person, but I don’t agree with her. I warned her last summer how it would be—that I should let or sell the place, and go back to the north, most likely.”

“Let or sell that dear old house!” said Pauline, looking at him reproachfully. “O, you don’t mean it! Why do you tease her by saying things you don’t mean?”

“She doesn’t care what I say,” said Ben. “And, besides, she is more likely to live to ninety than I to fifty. You may think I am talking a great deal about myself, but sometimes I wish she had never heard of me. I should have got on somehow, and it is bad to spend one’s life in slavery to a house and some acres of ground, which people tell you is old and dear, and think you a cold-hearted brute if you talk of selling. Yes, I sometimes wish I had never seen her, or Croome—”

“Never seen Aunt Lucia!” murmured Pauline, rather faintly, for there was something odd in his voice. “Well, then, you could never have talked to that man just now.”

“O, he wouldn’t have been left alone. Somebody else would have looked after him. What I’m doing for him is not

worth all— Do you know what I'm thinking about?" said Ben, leaning against the parapet, and looking into her face. "Is it still hopeless? I would do what you pleased about living here, and everything else, if only you would—if you would make life worth living at all. Don't you know, dear?" he said, his voice trembling very much.

Pauline did not speak; she did not turn away, but stood with lowered eyelids, looking at the stream. She remembered that day in the autumn very well—the thunderstorm, Ben's abruptness, from which she had shrunk away with no feeling but a wish to escape, and something very near dislike of him. It seemed to her that everything was changed now. She knew Ben so much better, it seemed to her; but at any rate she knew how gentle and generous

and patient he could be—no, she had not quite found him out yet—and he was good and clever and sincere; and to her, a lonely creature with no prospects in the world, he could offer a great deal. She felt her influence over him, though she had never used it seriously. She knew very well that his whole heart and being was taken up with her; she confessed to herself that it would be pleasant to bring all doubt and torment to an end, to have a fixed and peaceful fate, to be loved and spoilt and defended by some one, if it was only Ben Dunstan; to have the Court for her home, to do all sorts of things for her father and mother and the children. Surely these were strong arguments in favour of Ben, and yet why were they all so sad, so mixed with heartache?

“That is only the unsettled feeling,”

Pauline thought. "He is so good, it will soon go away."

"Don't you think I have been patient enough?" said Ben, who had been watching her all this time, keeping a strong restraint upon himself, and wishing he was clever enough to read the thoughts in a woman's face.

Pauline came back from the land of dreams, and gave him a quick glance.

"I told you to forget," she said, "and you promised that you would."

"Never!" said Ben. "One doesn't promise what is impossible. Listen. I've loved you ever since I knew you. I have only stayed here because I could not bear to go away from you, though sometimes I thought it would be the best way; but I couldn't do it. But, dear, do you hate me quite as much as you did?"

"I never hated you," said Pauline, rather sadly.

She was gazing down the stream again, and Ben dared not feel very sure yet.

"It was very like it," he said; "but if you don't now, that's good for me. Will you trust me, then?"

"I do trust you," said Pauline, in a low voice. "I think you are very good, and I am not half good enough for you."

"There you are mistaken; but it doesn't matter," said Ben.

It was strange how something still held him back. Pauline had made no sign of refusing him; he knew, though he could not understand it, that a wonderful change had come over everything, that the happiness of his life was quietly giving itself to him; and yet somehow he was as much puzzled as a child would

be if the moon came to him when he wanted her. Pauline was so calm, so cold, so sad, though she smiled as she spoke to him. All the excitement was on Ben's side; and this quiet girl kept him at a distance, and would not let him feel that she belonged to him.

"My darling, do you really mean that I may have you?" he said; and he came up close to her, and took her hand.

She looked straight into his eyes for one moment, and then drew herself away with a slight shiver.

"Let me speak," she said. "I don't know what I mean. Please let me go home now."

"You shall do as you like," said Ben, stepping back, and letting her hand go. He had quite as much pride as more ornamental people. "Tell me, though—may I come this evening?"

“O no; not this evening.”

“To-morrow, then?”

“I don’t know; I want to think. You must not hurry me too much.”

“Very well,” said Ben. “I will obey your orders, whatever they are; only be kind, and don’t keep me waiting too long.”

“If—you must let me tell Aunt Lucia when I like; you must not tell her.”

“Just as you please,” said Ben. “It cannot matter which of us tells her. She will be glad, I think. Pauline dear—”

He could hardly bear to let her go without something more than this—even a word to tell him that she cared for him, or at least that she was glad he cared for her. But he was not to have it; for a noise of wheels was coming along the lane, approaching the bridge, and Pauline walked quickly away to the other end of

it, where a path led through the meadows to the mill, and so into the Court garden. Ben went after her, and opened the gate for her. He was going to follow her through; but she shook her head, smiling, and would not let him come.

“No, please—don’t come with me,” she said. “Good-bye.”

He did not wait to watch her as she hurried away under the willows, but walked off along the lane, with bright thoughtful eyes, looking straight before him. The farmer in his cart, who overtook him directly afterwards, and said something about the weather, went home and told his wife that Mr. Dunstan looked as cheerful as if he was going to be married.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS MOWBRAY'S IDEA.

MR. MOWBRAY arrived unexpectedly the next day. He was in excellent spirits, and his aunt was delighted to see him. To Pauline his sudden visit was a little startling, and she wished that he had put it off a few days. Ben Dunstan understood that she meant to marry him, and so she certainly did; but it would have been much easier to tell her own people by letter than by word of mouth. It was not so very easy to tell Aunt Lucia that she had changed her mind, that the man she "did not even like" was to be her husband after all; but it was sure to be good news to Aunt Lucia; and she was conscious that

her father might not be so much delighted, even if he heard at the same time that Ben was to have Croome. Her father was unworldly; he was as sentimental as a woman in his ideas about marriage; and she loved him so much, and cared for his opinion so deeply, that she felt absolutely afraid to meet the incredulous smile in his eyes when she told him that she had accepted Ben Dunstan.

Mr. Mowbray's eyes followed her about the room that evening. He was quite aware that she was pale and distraite, and in the light of his new knowledge he put down these looks to her anxiety to hear of Gérard. If the child cared for him, it certainly was hard upon her that he should have come and gone without her seeing him.

But Mr. Mowbray with great prudence determined to say as little as possible till he had had his talk with Aunt Lucia. When

she said—"So your French friend is gone?" he answered with a careless air, "Yes. We showed him all we could. He is gone back wiser than he came;" and then turned the conversation to something else.

He did not see his aunt alone till the next morning, when Pauline, looking out of her window, saw them pacing together up and down the broad walk in the garden, the same walk where, six or eight months ago, Miss Mowbray had told the obstinate and ungracious Ben that she meant to make him her heir. What was happening there now? Pauline watched them for a minute or two from her high window; they were talking with great animation. She turned away and thought of Ben, who she had not seen since they parted on the bridge. He was keeping away, of course, in obedience to her wish;

she now thought he had better come, and tell the elders himself, but she did not know how to summon him.

In the meantime Mr. Mowbray was talking to Aunt Lucia very seriously, and a serious talk between them was a strange thing: they were too much alike to take each other gravely.

“You had our Frenchman here: how did you like him?” said Mr. Mowbray.

“He is beautiful to look at,” said Aunt Lucia; “and I liked his pretty manners. But I suppose he is not good for much, is he?”

“There is not a better fellow in Christendom.”

“O, you think so! And you asked him to stay with you! Well, as Pauline was safe here, I suppose it did not matter much; but you know she only missed him by an hour.”

"You think it would have been a pity to let them meet?"

"An absurdity. How are his matrimonial affairs getting on? He was engaged last year, wasn't he?"

"Yes, but fortunately that was broken off. He never cared for the girl, and she has since married his brother. So poor Gérard is shelved for life."

"How do you mean?" said Miss Mowbray.

Her nephew gave her a few particulars of the arrangement that Madame de Maulévrier had made for her sons.

"Just like those horrid French," said Miss Mowbray. "However, I am glad the Marquis did not submit to it. I wonder if it is possible—but still it is hardly likely—He did an unusual thing, didn't he, in declining to marry as his mother pleased? Do you think he disliked

the girl very much, or what was his reason?"

"Do you expect me to know his reason?"

"If I can guess it, surely you can. You were there last year, and saw the whole thing. Was not Pauline the reason?"

"Has she said anything to you about it?" said Mr. Mowbray.

"That is not a fair question, and I hate to be answered with questions. I am not going to tell you what Pauline says to me. I think you were very foolish last year, both of you; you let the girl fret herself into a fever, when you ought to have seen what was going on, and brought her away from that château long before. If I had not sent Ben to fetch you, I believe you would have been there now. The child was thoroughly miserable, being made love to by a man who was engaged

—and you wonder when I suggest that he is not good for much, and that Pauline had better not meet him!”

“Patience!” said Mr. Mowbray. “I may have been blind, but I never knew that they troubled their heads about each other at all.”

“Blind! I should think you were. What did you suppose, then, that Pauline was breaking her heart about?”

“I thought she was simply ill.”

“Simply ill! And no doubt her mother thought so too. Well, I hope I have cured her. I think she is getting over it now,” said Miss Mowbray.

Her nephew walked beside her for a few moments in silence. Presently he said, “I have a great liking for Gérard de Maulévrier. Don’t you think him an attractive fellow?”

“O, yes, very attractive,” said Miss

Mowbray, stopping to examine a pink may-tree that was rushing into bloom. "Of course when I saw him, I understood it all."

"You are right; it was a natural consequence. And you think she has entirely got over it?"

"I don't say that, exactly," Miss Mowbray answered, with a little hesitation. "She was startled when she heard he had been here, and as I say, it was much better that they should not meet. I suppose, however, he does not care for her now, or he would not have gone back to France so meekly. Pauline is much too good for a changeable Frenchman."

"If he was changeable, I should agree with you," said Mr. Mowbray. "but he is not; he is only hopeless. He is very much in love with Pauline, and I

am sure he will never marry anybody else."

"From what you say, I suppose he has no chance of doing so," said Aunt Lucia, turning away from her may-bush.

"Unless some heiress takes a fancy to him. He has nothing of his own, he has become nobody in his family, and I see no prospect before him but a very dismal one. He won't marry; he will always live with his mother."

"Poor Monsieur de Maulévrier! And heiresses in France are not romantic, I'm afraid. Now if I had been young!" said Aunt Lucia, with a light little laugh. "But I suppose he would not have liked to live in England, and I couldn't have deserted Croome."

"I don't know; he admires England very much," said Mr. Mowbray, entering into the joke. "And he talked to me

enthusiastically of Croome. But his affections were engaged, you see, before he saw you. It is very unfortunate."

After this they strolled a little way in silence. George Mowbray was beginning to feel like a Jesuit, and to wish that he had not mixed himself up in the business at all. He was also a little alarmed. It did not seem to strike his aunt that Pauline might be the romantic heiress in question, and he was haunted by a feeling of probable disappointment. He did not like to ask his aunt openly what she meant to do for Pauline; her present kindness to the girl made this almost impossible; he in fact perceived that he had undertaken a very awkward commission, and began to wish himself well out of it.

"You seem thoughtful, George," said Miss Mowbray.

“Well, my dear aunt, these young people and their love-affairs are a trouble to me. You might be thoughtful too, if a fellow had talked to you for hours about your daughter, and made you sorry to send him away without hope. I’m fond of the fellow,” said George. “I can’t help it. Nothing would please me better than to see him married to Polly.”

“Really! do you feel like that about it?”

“I do indeed, unfortunately—for of course I can’t venture to give him any encouragement. I can’t give them anything to live upon—and I can’t expect you to do it either; you have been kind and generous enough already.”

“Kind and generous! My dear George, I have done nothing for any of you. You have been kind to me, in letting me have

the child all this time. Dear me, this is a strange idea, marrying her to a Frenchman. And you really wish it? You like him enough for that?"

"I like him thoroughly. But I don't flatter myself that it will ever come off. I might as well wish for the moon."

Miss Mowbray thought over this for a minute or two.

"You say he admires England. He would not mind living in England, then, at least part of the year. We couldn't have Pauline banished to France entirely."

"As his own old château won't belong to him, I should think it would suit him very well to have a home in England," said Mr. Mowbray, smiling. "But this is building castles literally: a childish amusement, don't you think so?"

"Would Pauline like it, I wonder! Yes, poor child, no doubt she would," Miss

Mowbray wandered on, without answering him. "It's very inconvenient; but, after all, if one person wants a thing, and another doesn't, what's the use—he would not make her turn Roman Catholic?"

"I should think that might be arranged. I don't know their rules and laws; but Gérard is not narrow-minded in those things," said Mr. Mowbray. "My imagination has not carried me so far as those particulars," he added, smiling.

"Mine runs faster than yours," said Aunt Lucia. "I have a very pretty idea in my head. The only difficulty is to carry it out without being unkind and unjust to other people."

"What is it?"

"I shall not tell you, at least not to-day. Men's ideas of justice are different from mine, as I have often found to my cost. I must consult some-

body, but not you, and if you are a wise man you will let me alone."

"What are you thinking of? Don't do anything unjust, for heaven's sake."

"Don't interfere. How long can you stay with us?"

"A day or two, if you like to have me," said George.

He saw that his tactics were going to be successful, and was now rather frightened at what he had done. Injustice! what could she mean? was she going to break any promises for Pauline's benefit, alter her will, perhaps, disappoint the rest of the family? He satisfied himself, however, that she was not likely to do real injustice; in fact, he did not quite see how she could, for Croome and all her fortune was entirely her own; nobody could complain at her doing what she liked with it. It had never

struck him or his wife that she would be unjust if she left it all to Pauline, or to somebody else; of course their hopes had been for Pauline; but now he thought that she could not have decided finally. If everything was settled, she surely would not set to work so readily to overturn it all again. That would be almost beyond Aunt Lucia, though she was capable of most things; and then he reminded himself again that she had a full right to do what she pleased with her own. He tried to speak to her again on the subject, but she silenced him impatiently.

“Be quiet, please,” she said. “Go in and talk to your daughter, but not about this.”

“Well, no, I should think not,” said George, as he walked away.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISINHERITED.

“**D**EAR BEN,—Come to me at once.
“Your affectionate
“LUCIA MOWBRAY.”

This was Ben Dunstan's summons to the Court, for which he had been waiting so anxiously. It was like Miss Mowbray to dash off such a note, without a word of congratulation in it, but Ben found it very much to the purpose; he took his hat and set off across the fields without a moment's delay, whistling as he went, in the highest good humour with the world.

He had never been so happy in his life. The country looked beautiful; it

was luxury to breathe the air of spring. Ben remembered that it was May Day as he came out through his garden, and stuck a flower in his coat; this perhaps was a low and foolish and excited thing to do, but Ben did not think of elegance and dignity; he gave way to his elated, happy feelings, which were something quite new to him. At last, at last the day had come; his darling belonged to him; she had told her aunt; she would not be able to doubt and hesitate and keep him at a distance any longer. Ben felt inclined to throw his hat up as high as the trees, but some cows were looking on, and reminded him to be a little reticent. Poor Ben! it was all so absurd, so childish, and the cows with their thoughtful eyes might have guessed the depth of the absurdity.

When he reached the Court, Miss

Mowbray was hovering about the garden, waiting for him. She came to meet him, looking so extremely grave that the joy vanished from Ben's face and heart, and a terrible anxiety took its place. Miss Mowbray was almost too much wrapped up in her own thoughts to notice either.

"What's the matter?" said Ben, hastily. "Is she—ill?"

"Who? Nobody is ill," said Miss Mowbray. "What made you think so?"

An extraordinary chill came over Ben as she spoke. The momentary fear was gone, but he was his stupid old self again, and knew that all this time he had been dreaming.

"You looked so grave," he said, "that I was afraid—your niece—"

"Pauline? No, she is very well. She has gone out with her father."

“Is Mr. Mowbray down here?”

“He came yesterday. Come into the study, please. I want to talk to you.”

“Don’t you find it pleasanter out of doors?”

“Yes, it is pleasanter—but I have not anything pleasant to say, and I shall collect my thoughts better in the study.”

“Very well; as you like,” said Ben.

He followed her into the house slowly and heavily, wondering what all this could mean. Had Pauline changed her mind, and commissioned her aunt to tell him so? Yet, somehow, Miss Mowbray’s tone in speaking of Pauline made him think that she knew nothing about it. He determined to wait patiently, to tell her nothing, to ask no questions; evidently he would know the worst soon enough; and after all, he reflected, if Pauline had not chosen to say anything

yet, Miss Mowbray might be going to consult him on some affairs of her own, quite independent of her niece and himself.

He sat down in the comfortable study, with his back to the light, and looked at Miss Mowbray as she strolled round by the bookcases, pulling a book out here and there in a nervous preoccupied way. He had seen her in this sort of mood before, and had watched her without impatience, with a quaint, indulgent smile in his eyes, waiting for what she might choose to say and do next; but to-day it was not so easy to be patient.

“Ben,” she said at last, half looking round at him, and then turning to her books again, “you always speak the truth, don’t you? You said once that you did not wish me to leave you Croome. Did you mean it?”

“I meant it; yes,” said Ben, after a moment’s pause. He was startled, and felt almost untruthful as he said this; yet it was true; he had meant it then; she did not ask him if he was in the same mind now.

She evidently did not know how wonderfully the aspect of things had changed in the last day or two; or she would have understood that what was nothing to him for himself might be much to him for Pauline. What a horrid position, he thought, to depend on the fancies of a woman like this! He wished now that he had had strength to go away in the autumn; he had known at the time that it was weakness to stay.

“Well, then—you won’t mind, will you, if I alter my plans again? Now you see I have immense confidence in you,” said Miss Mowbray, coming into the middle

of the room, and fixing her clear eyes on Ben's downcast face.

She certainly had a strange influence over this very different creature, for he was obliged to look up and meet her eyes frankly, though he did not exactly smile.

"A great deal too much, I dare say," said Ben. "But any alteration in your plans is your affair, not mine. You can do it without consulting me; why don't you?"

"That would be mean," said Miss Mowbray. "I could not do that, and it is nasty of you to suggest it. After all, though, I don't believe you care the least for Croome. You are thrown away here, you dislike the people, you don't see any advantage in being a squire. You told me last year that you would let or sell the place when it came to you, and

go back to Forest Moor. You remember saying all that?"

"I do," said Ben.

"And I don't know, after all, that you have any special right to the property because your name is Dunstan."

"Certainly not."

"You knew what my wish was, when I determined to leave it to you. It was not only you that I wished to benefit, then."

Ben nodded. She was inconsistent, she was contradicting herself, but he could not tell her so. Besides, what did it matter? If the old idea had been driven out by a new one, there was an end of it; but he was curious to know what this new one might be.

"One must speak plainly to a thick-headed person like you," said Miss Mowbray, looking at him. "I wanted you to

marry Pauline. You spoiled your chance in the autumn by being in such a ridiculous, frantic hurry, but as you stayed here quietly afterwards, I thought still she might like you in time."

Here Ben smiled rather consciously, but Miss Mowbray's eyes were gone to the window.

"I have given it up now, though," she said. "It is no use trying to influence a girl against her will. I am sorry, but we can't always carry out our plans in this life, and your characters are so different, that I suppose I have been foolish all along; you would never have suited each other. Have not you come to the same conclusion yourself?"

Ben was silent for a moment; then he said, "It is a natural conclusion."

"Yes; I thought so," said Miss Mowbray, in triumph.

“Then what—then, am I to understand—” said Ben, with unusual hesitation; he hardly knew in what form to put his question, and ended by muttering, “Of course, though, it is no business of mine.”

“I don’t want to make any mystery about it,” said Miss Mowbray. “I am not afraid of telling you; I believe you are too generous to feel yourself ill-used. I have determined to make Pauline really my child, and to leave her everything I can.”

“I am very glad to hear it,” said Ben. He spoke in a strong voice, and smiled as he looked her straight in the face; this was not such bad news after all. “She is quite unfit to be poor,” he went on; “anxiety about money would spoil all the pleasure of her life.”

“Besides, I want her to marry well,”

said Miss Mowbray, "and when she is known to be my heiress, there will be much more chance of that. In fact, there is somebody now, who is all one can wish, I suppose, except in the matter of money. He is not so well off as he ought to be, and that is the reason why he has held back."

This was startling news. Ben's imagination began taking wild leaps among the young men of Somersetshire; but strangely enough M. de Maulévrier had ceased to be an alarming object. He was safe out of the way; and besides, there were limits even to Miss Mowbray's fantastic madness. She might have liked the Frenchman better than she expected, but she could never say he was "all one can wish." Ben's thoughts were inclined to fix on young Jack Marston, who had long admired Pauline, whose father, Sir John, had a large family

and great difficulty with his tenants, but who of course, being a baronet's eldest son, would be considered a good match, and on his side was pretty certain to look out for a girl with money.

Ben was very thoughtful and silent for a few minutes, while Miss Mowbray, who really felt sorry for him, strolled back to her book-shelves again. In his mind he laughed at himself for a fool: why should he feel the least alarmed at these plans, which were coursing through a silly woman's brain! He wished a little that Pauline had told her; he doubted for a moment whether he should tell her himself, and then remembered that Pauline had asked him not to do so.

No; he could not give even a hint of the real state of things; it would seem like distrust of Pauline; it would be binding her too soon, committing her before she

chose to be committed. But when was he to see or speak to Pauline again?"

"Did you say that Mr. Mowbray and your niece were gone out together?" he said at last, looking up. "Are they walking or driving?"

"They are gone to Cleeve," said Miss Mowbray. "George wanted to see some of his old friends there. I don't expect them back till six."

"Tell me," said Ben, after another pause, "does she know what you intend? And about this marriage, too—is it—is it her wish?"

"She knows nothing about either," said Miss Mowbray. "I was determined to talk it over with you first. I thought that was only fair. I have not even told George, though he and I were talking about her this morning. He does not know that I have ever made

a will at all. He would probably think that I was behaving badly to you."

"No one need think so if I don't," said Ben. "She, perhaps, may make a little difficulty."

"She is a girl; she has no right to an opinion," said Miss Mowbray, grandly. "Who knows? I may not tell her about that at all."

"I suppose, at least, you will warn her before the hero comes on the scene," said Ben, with a peculiar smile.

"These things manage themselves," said Miss Mowbray, laughing; then in a moment she became serious. "Yes, I shall tell her all about it," she said, "and I shall tell her what reason she has to be grateful to you. For if you had been dreadfully astonished, or dreadfully ill-used, I don't think I should have had the heart to do it. But you understand my motives, don't you?"

"I think I do."

"My dear Ben, you are much too good for your own interests."

"You are mistaken. I have one thing to ask."

"Anything; I think you deserve anything."

"No, I don't. But I hope you will make these new arrangements as soon as possible. Talk to her, talk to her father, have it out with everybody. Don't let us be in suspense and mystery longer than you can help; there is nothing so tiresome. Make all your arrangements, and send for Mr. Johnson to-morrow. Good-bye, I can't stay now. I must go and see some people."

"He certainly is the oddest man that ever lived," reflected Miss Mowbray, when he had shaken hands with her very cheerfully, and walked off at a

great pace through the garden. "And the most excellent. If Pauline had any sense she would like him better than all the foreigners in the world. Yet, when one compares the two, one can't wonder so very much."

CHAPTER IX.

FAIRY GIFTS.

MISS MOWBRAY had bargained with her nephew that she was herself to speak to Pauline on this subject. He might come in afterwards, she said, and tell her, if he chose, what Gérard had told him. Mr. Mowbray was obliged to submit, though he was not quite satisfied.

“You don’t think I had better write to him first,” he said. “Suppose his mother was to turn restive, and refuse to hear of it.”

“She is not likely to be such an idiot,” said Miss Mowbray. “No; you must certainly have Pauline’s leave to write to him. It would be too hard on the

poor man, to send for him, and then perhaps have him rejected after all. He made his offer to you, I understand. You can't take upon yourself to ask him to come here, without some idea that he will be welcome."

"Perhaps I have that idea."

"Don't be too sure; girls are curious things," said Aunt Lucia, shrugging her shoulders. "No; we will tell the child all about it, and see what she says."

Mr. Mowbray's heart perhaps misgave him a little, now that his wildest hopes were going to be realised. In the evening, after his return from Cleeve, his aunt had told him that her mind was made up; Pauline should have Croome, and her whole fortune, except ten or twelve thousand pounds. In the meanwhile, if Pauline married, she would allow her a thousand a year.

“She won’t want it, you know, as long as she is single, and lives with me,” said Aunt Lucia. “Dear me, I wish there was not a tiresome man waiting for her; I should like to see the effect on all the young men of this county, and their mothers. The Marstons: they would really be an amusing study, George; you might put them into a book.”

Mr. Mowbray did not enter much into these jokes; Aunt Lucia’s talk, the easy careless way in which she scattered her thousands, gave him quite a feeling of insecurity. Who was to assure one that she would not change her mind again, and make a dozen new wills after this one? He was not often troubled with doubts and anxieties, but now he felt grave, and ill at ease.

“I hope you are not disappointing any-

one—altering any better arrangement?” he ventured to ask.

“The thing is my own, as you have often told me,” replied Aunt Lucia. “No; the arrangement I am altering is a stupid, unsatisfactory one, and nobody is disappointed.”

After this assurance Mr. Mowbray felt happier; but he was still nervous, and began to wonder whether he had done right in speaking to her at all. Perhaps it was his nature to be more buoyant, more courageous in failure than in success.

Pauline lay awake nearly all that night, in anything but a happy state of mind. She now almost wished that she had allowed Ben to tell Aunt Lucia, for the task seemed every hour to become more difficult. Not that she at all doubted Aunt Lucia’s reception of the news, but she thought it would be easier when her

father was gone back, and he talked of staying at Croome till Monday. This was Friday night: that walk with Ben had happened on Wednesday; he would think her very cruel and inconsiderate if she kept him away much longer. She had heard from Ray, Aunt Lucia's maid, that he had been at the Court that afternoon; she was a little angry with him for this, till Ray added that her mistress had sent him a note, and then Pauline supposed that it was on some parish business, and began to feel sorry for the poor fellow, who had evidently obeyed her and kept silence.

Many arguments, many tormenting doubts and fears, were Pauline's company through that night, but at last she succeeded pretty well in conquering them, assuring herself again and again of Ben's goodness, and her own wisdom, and resolv-

ing to be open, and brave, and honourable, and to tell Aunt Lucia in the morning. Then she slept long, and came down late to breakfast rather pale and grave, with this burden of confession on her mind. She could not eat anything, and was conscious of a strange sinking at heart, which warned her that she did not care enough for Ben; but she had made up her mind, she told herself, and was not going to change it any more.

After breakfast she went out into the garden, all sweet sunny freshness in the May morning; and presently, as she expected, she saw Aunt Lucia coming to her there. Mr. Mowbray had gone into the study, and was buried among books.

“What makes you so pale, my child?” said Aunt Lucia.

“I don’t know. I did not sleep very well,” Pauline answered.

Her aunt took her arm, and they strolled along without saying much more till they came to the warm, sheltered seat by the pool in the middle of the garden. The fountain was playing gently, and many birds were singing; now and then a nightingale in the midst of the lilac bushes broke in with his deep music suddenly.

“Let us sit down for a few minutes,” said Aunt Lucia.

“Now or never!” thought Pauline—and how little she guessed which it was to be!

She waited a moment before she could speak, for her heart seemed to be beating violently in her throat. At last she began in a low, quiet voice. “Aunt Lucia, do you know—”

“Don’t interrupt me; I was going to tell you something,” said Miss Mowbray, and Pauline thought, with something

like relief, that she must wait a little longer.

“I want to have a business talk with you, my dear child,” said Aunt Lucia, laying her thin, delicate hand on Pauline’s. “It won’t be the first, will it? Do you really sometimes feel as if you were my child, Pauline? Have I been kind enough to you?”

“Nobody in the world could have been kinder.”

“O, yes, they could. I think on the whole I have been rather barbarous, for I talk to you as if you were my own child, and yet I have not behaved altogether as if you were. Love ought to be shown by actions, don’t you think so? I haven’t given you any real reason to know that I love you.”

“I should know it without any reasons,” said Pauline, softly. “You make me quite

happy ; what more could you have done ? ”

“ Ah, well, I’m glad of that. But if I was really your mother, I should not be satisfied with making you happy now. I should look to the future ; that is what good, prudent parents do. I should try to make sure of your happiness after I am dead.”

“ I don’t want to think about that time,” said Pauline. “ But you need not be anxious, dear, for I was going to tell you—”

“ Hush ! let me go on ; I have a great deal to say,” said Aunt Lucia ; and then in the gravest, simplest, most matter-of-fact words, she proceeded to tell Pauline that she was going to alter her will, and, in fact, to make her and Ben Dunstan change places in it.

The girl turned red and pale as her

aunt talked; she sat with her hands clasped, staring with wide blue eyes at Miss Mowbray. At first this extraordinary news seemed to change the whole aspect of life for her; then she perceived that it made no difference. If she was to marry Ben, what did it matter whether Croome belonged to her or to him? Of course, her instinct told her, she was really bound to marry him now; otherwise she would be doing him a deep injury. It would be treason to draw back now; it was impossible. So the first wonderful sensation of freedom and power, which flashed over her when she began to understand Aunt Lucia's meaning, died away at once, and she knew that all this gold was thrown upon her in the form of chains—not an unusual form, after all.

If Miss Mowbray thought of anything

but her own plans, perhaps she was faintly surprised that her niece did not exclaim at the injustice to Ben ; but then the girl was bewildered, and seemed hardly at first to realise what she meant. After a moment Pauline laid her head against her aunt's shoulder, and cried a little ; this was a sort of climax of the excitements of the last few days, and perhaps it was the easiest way out of a difficulty, for Miss Mowbray was always dreadfully distressed by tears, and now thought of nothing but caressing and comforting her. Her quick imagination also pounced upon the cause of Pauline's grief ; of course the child was thinking of Gérard, thinking, poor ignorant darling, how all obstacles would now have been removed, if he had only cared enough for her ! Miss Mowbray was so sure of this, and so heartily sympathetic, that she took those silent tears, the leaning of that

fair young downcast head, in place of all the exclamations, thanks, remonstrances, which she might reasonably have expected.

“Now, dear, I have something else to tell you,” she said after a few minutes, when Pauline’s sobs had ceased and she had moved away a little.

After one half look into Aunt Lucia’s tender smiling face, her eyes had wandered away to the flowers and the birds ; but she seemed hardly yet able to speak or to understand.

“If you cry at *this* news,” said her aunt, “I shall think you an ungrateful puss indeed.”

“I am not ungrateful,” murmured Pauline. “I don’t know what made me cry. I must tell you, dear Aunt Lucia—I shall feel happier when I have told you—”

“Come, I am not so very stupid,” said her aunt, with an impatient laugh. “Your

thoughts are not so deeply hidden that you need put them into words. I know all about it; you need not tell me."

"Do you?" said Pauline, bewildered.

"You are a goose, but I suppose you were born so," said Aunt Lucia. "I must tell you that his coming here that day was a very good thing. If I had not seen him, I should never, never have consented. But though I was rude and horrid to him, as I told you, I liked him very much all the time. I was angry because I did not understand him. If I had known his feelings, I should have sympathised—as I do now, my dear child."

"What do you mean? I have not the faintest idea what you mean," said Pauline, flushing scarlet; all her wits had come back to her now.

"You are angry with him, are

you? Well, I am not surprised, as you have only seen the surface of things. I did not mean to joke about it, though, Pauline," she said, with great sweetness. "I am not trying to tease you, my child. Monsieur de Maulévrier has told your father of his love for you—and if you like him, there is no obstacle now, that I know of. To see you happy will be—my greatest happiness."

Poor Pauline! The first news had been nothing to this, which seemed to fall upon her with a dull, stunning, crushing pain. No; she did not feel the least inclined to cry; but she did not know where to look, or what to say, and she leaned forward, burying her face in her hands with a slight moan.

Then she heard Aunt Lucia saying in quick, alarmed tones, "I have told her too suddenly. Come here, George. She

must have some wine or something. I am afraid she is ill."

Pauline was aware of her father's shadow, as he came and stood before her on the walk, and she knew too that Aunt Lucia got up and hurried away. After a minute he touched her shoulder and said gently, "Come and take a little walk with me, Polly."

She obeyed him at once; he gave her his arm, and they walked slowly and silently towards the farther end of the garden.

"Tell me more, papa," she said at last. "Tell me what he said to you."

Mr. Mowbray looked down at her with a pleased, affectionate smile; he perceived that she, at any rate, would not blame him for taking up Gérard's cause, and he thought Aunt Lucia need not be alarmed; the shock of such a sur-

prise as this was not likely to hurt her. He began at once, half gravely, half playfully, to tell her about Gérard.

When, after a few minutes, Pauline's thoughts flew back with pain to Ben Dunstan, she perceived that it was now too late to say anything about him to her father. After listening with intense forgetful joy to what he was telling her, how could she, for very shame, confess that she had almost engaged herself to another man! Almost; she hardly knew now, in this struggling confusion of thoughts, how far she was really bound to Ben. She was ready to make excuses for herself; that was never very difficult to Pauline; but she knew that her father would not understand them. Loving and indulgent as he might be, he was a man, and he would think that she had behaved weakly and dishonourably; he

would be shocked and disappointed. She had tried in vain that morning to tell Aunt Lucia, and now, among these new discoveries, she could not even try to tell him. It was a sort of satisfaction to call herself a few hard names—false, cowardly, mercenary; yet, how could she have guessed that after so many months this wonderful thing would come, that the parting at Maulévrier was not final after all! Ah, if only she had had more patience, how happy she might have been now!

“So now, the only thing we want is his mother’s consent,” Mr. Mowbray talked cheerfully on. “I don’t think she will make much difficulty. I dare say she has reconciled herself to the idea of his not marrying; though no doubt her ambition was disappointed, she was sure to like his staying at home with her. He will

have to live in England part of the year, you know, Polly. Aunt Lucia quite expects that—and we owe everything to her.”

“But I was going to say, papa, that can’t be,” began Pauline, eagerly. “Aunt Lucia is too kind, but she must not leave it all to me. I can’t have it, really. Oh, I should be so much happier without it—if she would only believe that. Will you tell her?”

“I can’t, Polly, because I don’t agree with you,” said her father. “It sounds disagreeable, but what I say is literally true—without Aunt Lucia’s kindness, this could not have happened at all. It is the only thing that will make the Marquise consent—your *dot*, my dear—Gérard will be a rich man after all, the richest of his family. Yes, you have a horrid mercenary father, haven’t you! but there’s no disput-

ing facts, money one must have in this world. If you had been as penniless as Gérard, I should have left him in his hopelessness, and as it was, I took care to be prudent; I wouldn't encourage him much, till I had some notion what Aunt Lucia meant to do for you."

"But it is unfair—why should she—no, I can't have it," said Pauline.

"It is not unfair; it is only what your mother and I have expected, ever since she took possession of you. Somebody must have it; why not you? Ben Dunstan was the only person who might have thought he had a claim, but he has enough for himself already, and besides, I have no doubt she will leave him something. So don't trouble yourself, Polly, about other people's business. Be thankful for your blessings, and tell me—shall I write to Gérard to-day?"

Pauline was silent for a minute. Without betraying herself too far, how could she explain to her father what Aunt Lucia was doing? Perhaps it was not her business after all; perhaps she had no right to tell him the contents of Aunt Lucia's last will, which had been told her as a secret in the autumn. Yet, if it had not been for this other entanglement, Pauline would probably have told her father that her good fortune meant the opposite for Ben.

"Make enquiries, papa," she said, looking at him with anxious eyes. "Don't let Aunt Lucia do anything unjust, if you can help it. I don't want it—it's all very difficult, and I don't know what to say."

"Aunt Lucia is not likely to do anything unjust," said Mr. Mowbray. "Her whims are always generous, and this is rather a sensible one. Take my advice,

put money matters out of your head, and tell me if I may write to Gérard to-day."

"No, not to-day," said Pauline, after another pause. Her father looked at her in some astonishment; her eyes fell, she was flushed and confused, and tried to explain herself.

"You must give me time to think," she said. "I don't understand anything yet."

"It is a very simple case; what do you want to think about?" said Mr. Mowbray.

"Wait till to-morrow, I will tell you then," said Pauline.

She left him and went away to the house. Near the door she met Aunt Lucia, who held out her hand, saying, "Well, how are you now?"

Pauline took her hand and kissed it, but did not look or speak, and hurried

on into the house without stopping more than a moment.

“French fashions already,” laughed Miss Mowbray to herself, as she walked away towards the garden.

CHAPTER X.

“IN SLEEP, A KING; BUT WAKING, NO SUCH
MATTER.”

MR. DUNSTAN was generally at home on Saturday afternoon, and was supposed to be writing his sermon, but to-day, being impatient, restless, and almost angry with the person he loved best in the world, he wisely felt that his mind was not fit for sermons, and went out instead to dig in the garden. This was an unusual occupation for him; but something violent seemed necessary. Another long day was nearly gone, he had not seen Pauline or received any message from her. Surely she must have told her aunt by this time, and her father too. Perhaps Mr. Mowbray was putting a spoke in the

wheel ; he might think that if his daughter was to be an heiress, she might marry some greater man than the Rector of Croome. That somebody, that horrid somebody Miss Mowbray had hinted at—Mr. Mowbray might very likely be inclined to favour him. But then Pauline—

“What a brute I am !” said Ben to himself, and he pulled off his coat, threw it on the grass, and went on digging with great fury for several minutes. The earth lay in brown furrows, sending up a fresh living smell into the sunshine.

Ben’s arms began to ache very soon, and he stopped to rest for a moment, sticking his spade into the ground. Then he was conscious of a step, of a presence, and looking round he saw Pauline standing on the lawn. He was in his coat in a moment, and went forward with a flushed face to welcome her ; the joy of seeing her

banished all feelings of doubt and fear, leaving only remorse for them.

She was very pale; she was tired with her walk in the sun; and if her manner was rather grave and cold and strange, that of course was because Miss Mowbray had been telling her of the ridiculous change of plans, and she thought, dear generous girl, that it might vex him. As if it mattered a straw! That, no doubt, was why she had come to him, instead of sending for him.

Ben restrained himself nobly, and only showed his joy in his eyes; he rushed into the house and brought out a chair into the quiet sheltered corner of the garden where he had been digging his new rose-bed. Pauline, who was really very tired, was glad to sit down, and Ben threw himself on the grass near her.

“I didn’t expect any visitors,” he said,

glancing at his hands, and then at her. "You have caught me in the rough, you see."

"Are you fond of gardening?" said Pauline, dreamily.

"No, I hate it," said Ben. "But I wanted something hard, and digging takes it out of you as much as anything, if you put your strength into it. You have kept me waiting a long time," he added, after a moment.

"Have I?" said Pauline.

"You know you have. However, now you are here, I mustn't say a word of reproach. I know why you have come," he said, "and why you look so troubled. Don't look troubled; smile."

His own smile, of trust, content, and a love deeper than Pauline could ever know, the tone of his voice, which made one quite forget his rough exterior,

touched her to the heart. She put up her hand to her eyes, and said, "I can't," with almost a sob of pain.

"My dear, what is it?" said Ben. He got up, and came and stood with his hand on the back of her chair, looking down at her, but she kept her head bent, and turned away from him.

"There's no reason why you should be dismal about it," said Ben. "I trust you and you trust me—but I suppose they have been telling you that it won't do—is that it?"

"No—they don't know," said Pauline, finding that she must give some answer.

Ben was puzzled, and began to frown; but his voice and manner were still quite tender and gentle.

"Are you vexed because your aunt means to alter her will?" he said. "I don't care the least—I told her so;

she sent for me yesterday and told me all about it. It seems rather foolish, perhaps; but I could not explain to her, you see, how unnecessary it is, because I had promised you. It was rather a pity not to tell her at once—and do you mean that you have not told her yet? Shall we go down together now—when you are rested?"

"No, no," said Pauline. "Please go away—go a little farther off, because there is something I must tell you."

Ben immediately obeyed, and went back to his former place on the grass. There was nothing to be read in her face, however long and earnestly he might gaze; she was looking down, flushed and agitated, wondering how she could tell him, how this painful interview was to end. She had come, feeling that it was the only thing she

could do, that there was no way of making amends to Ben; and as she came she had composed a long explaining speech to tell him that she had changed her mind, that she had behaved to him very badly, but that indeed Aunt Lucia's change of purpose was no fault of hers. And then, she thought, all must depend on Ben's generosity; if he was dreadfully hurt and injured, she must give up the bright future that lay before her now, must absolutely refuse to be Aunt Lucia's heiress—if that was possible—and must make her father tell Gérard to forget her really, as he seemed to have done in all these months past. Not that she would marry Ben; no, never; and he must at any rate be made to understand this. All these sad thoughts had made Pauline feel quite heroic as she climbed

the hill to the Rectory; she felt like a martyr; she was sacrificing herself. To what? to her faithfulness to Gérard, who after all had been faithful to her.

But, of course, when she was face to face with Ben, all her fine words and explanations fled; she was so sorry for him, and also for herself, who had such horrid painful things to go through, that she could hardly speak reasonably; and the thought flashed across her, with wonder and regret, that she might have trusted her father with everything, and begged him to make Ben understand. He might have been surprised and angry at first; but he would have helped her out of the scrape, she thought, for in his mind her life and Gérard's were quite bound up together.

However, here she was, sitting in Ben's garden, with his grave face, his anxious

eyes watching her, and his earnest voice saying that he trusted her. There was no escape; somehow, without looking at him, she must tell him that she did not deserve to be trusted. She was afraid, beginning to realise what his disappointment would be, and how the love of such a strong nature might be turned into something worse than anger; but then after all she remembered that he was a good man, and this thought gave her more courage. After a silence, during which Ben watched her as if fascinated, hardly knowing what he thought or feared, she began to speak suddenly.

“I forget what I said on Wednesday. I did not promise—did I?”

A curious flash came into Ben's eyes, and he turned a little pale.

“You let me understand that you meant it,” he said, in a low voice. “You did not

actually promise in words. You said I was not to hurry you—but you talked of telling your aunt. I took it as a promise. Do you mean that you have changed your mind?" he went on in a louder, harsher tone. "You like the plans they have made for you better, no doubt. Of course—you can do as you please now—but you are behaving—you are false and cruel to me!"

"Don't frighten me," said Pauline, in a whisper.

"I give you back your promise. I was a fool ever to ask you again," said Ben.

He sprang up, and walked away from her to the far end of the lawn, where it opened on a wide distant view, his church spire in the foreground, peacefully pointing up among fir-trees.

Pauline sat still; she could not defend

herself, and she knew he was right to be angry ; but she began to think in a dismal, desolate way, that there was no hope for her and Gérard, and that everything must be as it was before ; for how could she injure this man still further by taking his inheritance !

It seemed a long time, perhaps it was five minutes, before Ben came back to her. He had conquered himself sufficiently to speak without passion.

“Tell me the meaning of all this,” he said. “I want to know the truth—but if you say it a thousand times, I shall not believe that money has anything to do with it. You are not throwing me off because your aunt has told you. You have some better reason than that.”

Pauline dared not yet look at him, but she felt almost grateful ; it was easier to speak now.

"I will tell you the truth," she said.
"I am very sorry—"

"I asked for the truth," said Ben, in a tone that brought a deeper flush of colour to her face.

She would have liked to walk away without another word; but she had brought this thing on herself, and it was necessary to go through with it. His scorn perhaps made it easier, for it roused a little defiant spirit. He need not be rude and odious, she thought; and certainly she need not trouble herself to express any more regret, which after all was real.

"When Aunt Lucia first told me about altering her will—I shall now beg and entreat her not to do it—" she said, coldly—"I thought as you did, of course it does not matter; and I was beginning at once to tell her about you. I began

three times, and she would not listen; she had so much to say. Yes, you are right, I did mean it on Wednesday. I have felt lonely and unhappy for a long time, and I thought you would be good to me. But when I got home that day I was not happy, and I knew it was not all right, for my feeling was only selfishness after all."

"Of course," said Ben, as she paused for a moment, "I knew your feeling was not like mine—how could it be! But you might have trusted me—I would have been good to you—I believe you would have been happy in time. You know all that, though—and you have some better reason still."

"Yes—some news that my father brought," she answered; she was getting braver every moment now. "He said that Monsieur de Maulévrier wished to

come—wished to know if I—in fact, if I would be glad to see him, and I could not say I would not."

To this, Ben made no answer at first but a slight exclamation. Presently he said, "Thank you. I see it all now. Your aunt gave some hints the other day which I really did not understand. Well—that is all, I suppose. It was kind of you to come and tell me, and now I'm sure it will bore you to stay here any longer. Indeed, the only kindness you can do me is to go away, and never let me see you again."

Pauline was standing up now, quite calm, and able to look at him; the worst was over.

"But I have one more thing to say," she said. "I don't ask you to forgive me, I suppose you never will, and I can't expect it. But I must tell you

that whatever the consequence may be to me, I will not have Croome, I will not have it all taken away from you, and left to me. Rather than behave so meanly, so horribly, I will give up all the happiness—I mean I will have nothing that depends on my having Croome. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," said Ben. He had suddenly become gentle, and his hard contemptuous manner had departed. It was strange to Pauline, even at that moment, to feel the depth and strength of her influence over him.

"I do understand," he said, "but you are quite mistaken if you think that sort of thing is a comfort to me. You might have a little satisfaction in the thought that you were acting generously, and giving up all you cared for in life because I was a disappointed fool—but do

you think I want you to be miserable? do you think I want Croome? I hate the place. I really shall go away this time," he said, with a faint smile, "and never trouble it again. There—you couldn't help it after all. Don't apologise—don't try and mend what's far beyond your mending. Go away now; that's all you can do; forget all this nonsense and be happy."

There were tears in Pauline's eyes as she stood and looked at him.

"I won't have it; I can't," she said, in a low voice.

"My dear, you will do as your aunt and Mr. Johnson choose," said Ben.

He walked off towards the house, as if he meant to leave her there; but after a few steps he came back again.

"That fellow," he said, "forgive me—but it was him all along, I suppose.

Well, I've suspected it. But your father does not know half enough of him ; he he can't tell whether he is to be trusted."

"Yes, he can," said Pauline, very low.

They walked silently together across the grass, and to the gate which led to the path through the fields. There she shyly held out her hand, but Ben took no notice of it ; he walked on beside her, down to the lane, across the bridge where they had talked on Wednesday, to the willow-shaded path that led along by the river. All this time neither of them had spoken one word. There at the gate he took her hand and grasped it, and looked at her for a moment steadily, almost smiling.

"Good-bye," he said. "God bless you. I hope I may never see you again."

Pauline's lips moved, but she made him

no answer. Just like the other day, he let her turn away under the willows, and walked off himself along the lane, perhaps not quite so cheerfully.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE FAUBOURG.

AFTER that day, nobody had any time or thoughts to bestow on Ben. It is to be supposed that he went through his church services on Sunday, and preached two sermons as usual; but Pauline, after a sleepless night, did not find herself able to go to church; Miss Mowbray, always irregular in her ways, stayed at home too, and Mr. Mowbray employed the morning in composing a letter to Gérard. It was such an important letter that he wrote it three or four times over. Pauline, going into the study after he had done, found several rough copies torn in two and lying on

the floor; she collected them carefully, lighted a match and burned them on the hearth.

Ben, of course, did not come to the Court at all that day, but the next morning Miss Mowbray had a note from him, telling her that he was going off immediately for a month's holiday. He had telegraphed to an old acquaintance of his, an unattached parson, to come and take his work for him; this man had done the same thing before, and had been liked by the people. "He will be here in three days," wrote Ben, "and will look after Lyne. Consider whether you will give him the living; his wife would like it, and I cannot stay much longer."

"What has the stupid creature taken into his head now!" said Miss Mowbray. "He was quite cheerful and contented the other day, when he came to see me.

Give the living to that man! certainly not. He is one of the dullest men I ever met, and his wife is insufferable."

But she did not trouble herself very much about Ben and his doings. If he wanted a holiday, let him go; he would come back in a better humour; and this parson's wife, who was an invalid, was not likely to bore her by coming with him now. Miss Mowbray's thoughts were entirely taken up with Pauline and Gérard; when would he write? when would he come? She sent a note to Mr. Johnson, asking him to come and see her, and was rather vexed to find that he was gone away for a week or two.

"Well, it does not matter," she said. "A few days can't make any difference."

Mr. Mowbray could not stay with them at Croome any longer. He had had an offer from a good firm of publishers for

Royalty in Shadow, and having set his daughter's affairs in train, he started off to London on Monday in high spirits, and full of projects of his own. It really seemed as if fortune was beginning to smile on him and his family. So Miss Mowbray and her niece were left alone, and those were certainly the strangest days in Pauline's life. Days of waiting, of looking forward to a future which, though likely in fact, seemed to her thoughts impossible and unbelievable. She walked through those days in a dream; the flowers bloomed that May more brightly than ever, the nightingales sang at all hours in the garden, the old Court looked its best, and Pauline wandered about under the blue sky, or sat still with a book that she did not read: in truth she could do nothing but wait. All ideas of usefulness were given up now; the girls of Croome were not likely to be

taught anything by this other girl, who was, as it were, sitting in the midst of a summer dawn, waiting for the great, warm, golden sun to show himself above her horizon.

These were not unlike the dreamy days at Maulévrier, except that those dreams had been hopeless and painful, while these were only bright forerunners of a reality. And yet, somehow, Pauline was afraid to be happy. I do not know that she was haunted by the thought of Ben, who had forgiven her, and had wisely taken himself out of her sight. She was surrounded with care and tenderness. Aunt Lucia, in arranging her future, seemed to have doubled her love for the girl whose happiness she had taken into her hands so fearlessly. Everything looked bright for Pauline, and yet she was afraid. The days were vague and calm, but dreadful dreams came at

night, and more than once she started up to find herself crying and trembling, she did not know why. Perhaps there was still something remaining of the weakness of last year; and also, ever since Gérard came to England, her mind had been painfully excited; these fancies would no doubt be cured by the sight of him.

Mr. Mowbray's letter was posted, and went on its way to France. Gérard had told him at the last moment that he was not going straight back to Maulévrier, but thought of paying Victor and Françoise a little visit in Paris; and he gave Mr. Mowbray the address of their apartment.

The young Comte and Comtesse were at present remarkably happy together; they had enjoyed the winter thoroughly, and were still more enjoying the spring; they went out a great deal, and Paris was to both of them the most fascinating place

on earth. They had rooms in one of the fine old hotels of the Faubourg St. Germain, in the heart of Legitimist society, and were very popular among their neighbours. Madame de Coigny, Madame de Loches, all the gay people who had assembled at Boiscarré to meet the Prince of Catalonia, with many others of their kind, and more still of a quieter, but not less loyal, disposition, were the daily companions and friends of Françoise de Maulévrier. She was not fast, or a flirt, being in love with her husband; but all these ladies, who would have startled the propriety of Madame de Brye, liked the little thing, called her piquante and simple, and enjoyed the small knowledge of the world and its ways which she had picked up at Tourlyon.

Victor was equally successful; he had always been popular, and now that life

had arranged itself so pleasantly for him, he was much happier and better-tempered than of old.

Françoise was now quite ready to like Victor's family; she behaved very well to Madame de Maulévrier, and was even resigned to the thought of spending a few weeks with her in the summer; but her favourite was Gérard; and both she and Victor were really pleased when he wrote from London to say that he would pay them a visit on his way home. Then Victor suggested an addition to this plan. He had seen his mother a few weeks ago; she had not seemed well and had talked of consulting a Paris doctor; how would it be to ask her to come now, to meet Gérard? they could then go back together to Maulévrier. Françoise did not even make a face at this proposal; she said, pleasantly,

“Just as you please, *mon ami*. If you think your mother would like to come, I shall be very glad.”

Gérard came, and Madame de Maulévrier came also. Her pleasure at meeting him, and finding that his English visit had brightened him in a wonderful way, put her at once into the best of humours. The doctor also was encouraging; and her daughter-in-law had no trouble in entertaining her, for when she was not with Gérard some old friend was sure to lay claim to her. People who had known her as a girl, who had known her parents, her brothers and sisters; old counts, old duchesses, who might have seen the Revolution, came out of their ancestral hotels in the Faubourg and welcomed her among them again. Françoise found that her own importance was certainly increased by her belonging to that for-

gotten recluse, the Marquise de Maulévrier : she was amused, but she bore it all very well. Even the admiration bestowed on Gérard did not affront her, though it seemed like a reflection on Victor for being shorter and less handsome.

One day, when Madame de Maulévrier had taken Gérard to breakfast with an old friend, the Comte and Comtesse, having breakfasted together, strolled out into the garden behind the hotel. It was one of those quiet old gardens that are found in the heart of Paris, perhaps not unlike the garden where Clive and Ethel Newcome talked once "in an avenue of lime-trees, which are still permitted to grow in that ancient place." There were statues too, very much the worse for weather, and a dreary fountain green with moss ; but even here it was May ; the sun shone, and the shadows of the limes

with their young little leaves fell flickering on the even gravel where Victor and Françoise walked, and on their heads when they sat down on a bench near the fountain.

“Yes,” said Victor, “my mother has still an idea of Mademoiselle de C——.”

“But, Victor, it is impossible. Poor Gérard has nothing.”

“She has enough for both, if she could only fall in love with him, and if her mother would only appreciate him.”

“O,” laughed Françoise, shaking her head. “Maman expects too much—and besides, I know very well that Gérard will never marry.”

Has he told you so?”

“Oh—yes—you must have heard him say it a hundred times. Here he comes—that is odd—escaped already from Madame de C——.”

Gérard came down the steps from the house and joined them. He was looking well and very handsome ; certainly much less melancholy than before he went to England.

“My mother has gone out driving with the C——s,” he said, “so here I am. How pleasant it is under the trees ; these limes remind one of Maulévrier. I am glad to find you here together. I wish to consult you, Victor, and you too, Fanni, for you know my history.”

Françoise opened her large eyes and fixed them upon him with a wondering smile.

“Go on,” said Victor.

“Do you think it is impossible for me to marry?” said Gérard.

They were almost too much startled, both of them, to answer him instantly, and he coloured as he looked from one to the other.

"I see you do," he said.

"Not at all, my dear, not at all," said Victor, with unusual earnestness. "Nothing would please me better. Why should it be impossible? Money is the only thing wanted, and if that—"

"We were only surprised because you have so often said you never would, you know, Gérard," said his sister-in-law. "And I thought you would probably keep your word. But no one will be more glad. Tell us all about it, please."

"To begin with, who is she?" said Victor.

Gérard coloured still more. He was sitting in a corner of the bench, Françoise being at the other end, and Victor in the middle. He stooped forward and looked on the ground, smiling; it was a difficulty to pronounce her name. At last he raised his eyes, looked at his brother, and said very deliberately,

“Mademoiselle Pauline Mowbray.”

“The English girl!” exclaimed Françoise, in a kind of consternation.

Victor gave her a glance and an expressive shrug; then, stroking his moustache, he turned gravely to Gérard.

“But, my dear fellow—she is no doubt beautiful and charming—but surely her father has a large family, he never was very rich, and last year he lost the little he had. Have they suddenly come into an immense fortune?”

“Why, Gérard,” said Fanni, “did not you go to see them the other day, in a small house near London?”

“All that is true,” said Gérard, “and you are both right. Without some wonderful change of circumstances, our marriage must always have remained impossible. But the change has come.”

“*Mon Dieu!*” sighed Fanni, and her husband muttered some other exclamation.

“*Mademoiselle Mowbray has an aunt,*” said Gérard, “a very rich person—charming too; I saw her the other day at her old country-house. Her niece has been living with her for some months; she has in fact adopted her, and is going to leave her her fortune. Now I told M. Mowbray the other day that his daughter was—that only circumstances hindered me from proposing myself to him as his son-in-law—and he told me what he thought probable, the kindness, the great generosity of his aunt—she is an old lady, you understand—and I have now had a letter from him to say that this is all settled—and still more, that if I wish to come to Croome—that is where the aunt lives—I have only to write and announce

myself, and she will be happy to see me."

"And you have made up your mind?" said Victor, after listening to these wonderful disclosures.

"You know my only difficulty—my mother."

"Ah! yes, indeed—Anglaise, Protestante—she no doubt has prejudices," muttered Victor.

"But, Gérard, it will make you so very happy," said the kind little sister-in-law, bending forward with congratulating smiles. "A good fortune—and what you have always wished. Ah, don't I remember—"

She drew back, laughing and colouring, for her husband's eyebrows went up a little, and for the next few minutes she did not say much, but listened with interest as Gérard went on talking to his brother,

telling him frankly all his plans and hopes, all the ideas that had been suggested by Mr. Mowbray's letter.

Victor did not approve much of this English marriage; he disliked the English, and had taken no fancy to the Mowbrays; his brother's infatuation for Miss Mowbray had always puzzled him, though certainly he had reason to be grateful to it. He thought in his own mind that Gérard had better not marry at all, unless he could marry a rich Frenchwoman of his own rank—but as Aunt Lucia said once, heiresses in France are not romantic; they, or at least their relations for them, always expect an equivalent, and Gérard, with all his fascination, had not a penny in the world. Mademoiselle de C——, for old family reasons, might have been just possible, but of course that depended first on Gérard, and his

resolution was plain enough; he would marry this English girl or nobody.

Victor did not think his mother would consent; he rather hoped she would refuse point-blank, and he did not believe that Gérard would have courage and obstinacy enough to resort to a "*somma-tion respectueuse*." On the whole, Victor was not pleased, though he dissembled his feelings, and talked the thing over with Gérard in a friendly reasonable way. He felt that any strong objection would come awkwardly from him, who owed his present position in life to Gérard's withdrawal.

Françoise, whose mind was not so practical as her husband's, sympathised far more heartily. She liked Gérard very much now, better than any of the family, except Victor, and it often troubled her to think that he was to spend a long

dull life alone with his mother at Maulévrier, just because his people and hers had made a mistake about them at the beginning. If they had found somebody else for him, somebody he cared for, and who cared for him, his life might have been so different, poor fellow; and he might never have met Mademoiselle Mowbray at all. But as he had met her, and was so very much in love with her, and as she was to have plenty of money after all, Françoise thought that nothing could be better. Very pleasant and amusing for Gérard, to have an estate in England, and to spend part of the year there. She could see no objection, and in her mind she thought that his mother would be wrong and barbarous and selfish, if she refused her consent to such a happy arrangement for him. So she listened with great interest to all that

the brothers were saying, and encouraged Gérard with smiles and nods, a pleasant relief to Victor's considerate gravity.

They had been talking some time when Madame de Maulévrier appeared. Madame de C——had brought her back, on the return from their drive, and she was evidently in a good temper. The young men got up to make room for her; she sat down beside Françoise, and talked for a few minutes of the people she had seen.

“Jeanne de C——is one of the prettiest and most charming girls, I ever met,” said she. “What do you think, Gérard? do you agree with me?”

“Oui, ma mère,” said Gérard, absently.

“You are not enthusiastic,” said the Marquise. “Now it strikes me that one seldom sees such a girl.”

“She certainly is very distinguished,” said Victor.

“As to you, Victor, I did not expect you to admire her so much; she is not the sort of person for you. Pardon, *chère enfant*—there are different kinds of perfection; everybody must allow that. But that tallness, that fairness, that *je ne sais quoi* of goodness and dignity, I know that if Gérard had to describe a perfect woman, she would not be so very unlike Jeanne de C——.”

“Yes, *maman*; you are right; we all agree with you,” said Fanni, nodding and smiling.

“The Vicomtesse is of course anxious to marry her well,” said Madame de Maulévrier. “Jeanne is nineteen—would you have believed it? and she has already had twenty offers, but her mother means to let her choose for herself to a certain extent. I don’t quite agree with her—young people are foolish, even the best of them—but the

Vicomtesse and Jeanne are both inclined to think more of a man's character than his fortune, and the girl is too good to oppose her mother seriously. Madame de C—— is really very unworldly—marvellously so—I am not sure that she would not even accept my poor Gérard, if he was to offer himself.”

Madame de Maulévrier turned round quickly and looked at Gérard, who was standing with his arms folded and his eyes on the ground. It seemed possible to Françoise, who was watching him, that he had not heard a word of what his mother had been saying.

“Under the circumstances, could he offer himself?” said Victor, with a half smile.

“That is the difficulty. I don't know. I might manage it for him,” said the Marquise.

There was a little silence. Victor and his wife both looked at Gérard, Fanni's eyes full of amusement, mixed with anxiety; how or when would he crush his mother's springing hopes by telling her his own?

They were not long in suspense. Gérard came a few steps nearer to his mother, and lifting his eyes to her face, with an earnest, resolute expression which startled her and caught her attention at once, began in simple words to tell her all that he had told the others just now. At first she frowned, hardly understanding him; then as he went on she turned very pale.

"That girl!" she said. "*You* marry that girl! Never! Do you think I have forgotten—"

Gérard coloured crimson.

"It was my fault, mother," he said. "It was my doing all along—it was no fault of hers."

“You are talking foolishly,” said Madame de Maulévrier. “*Merci!* I prefer young ladies who have been properly brought up. Is it possible! I hoped that madness was forgotten long ago.”

“Madness or not,” said Gérard, “it will never be forgotten as long as I live. It is my life—think a little before you take it away.”

Madame de Maulévrier laughed. He turned from her, and walked off down the avenue, unable at the moment to control his anger and disappointment. Françoise looked after him sadly.

“Victor,” said Madame de Maulévrier, “your poor brother is out of his mind. Had he told you all this fine history before, then? What did you say to him?”

“I said that I thought your consent doubtful.”

"Doubtful! you might have been more positive. What do you think? Does it not seem to you absolute madness?"

"Its only redeeming feature is Mademoiselle Mowbray's large fortune," said Victor, quietly.

"And, maman—that Gérard adores her," said Fanni, leaning forward eagerly.

"I knew that, my child, long before you did," said Madame de Maulévrier. She sighed, her sudden passion had left her, and she raised a sad and careworn face to look after her son as he walked down the avenue. "People who consider those things," she said, "who allow themselves to be ruled by adorations, are utterly unfit for the business and duties of life. Your brother has all the winter been so depressed, so unlike himself, that I was even glad for him to have the distraction of visiting that odious England

—little did I think what was to come of it. Certainly, though, it seems amazing that her parents should encourage Gérard. Far better for the girl to marry a countryman of her own, with money, which all the English have. But her father is just as thoughtless and romantic as Gérard himself—and her mother, good stupid woman, probably has nothing to do with it.”

“It is perhaps useless to fight for ever against these romantic people,” said Victor, with philosophy. “The worst feature in the case, to my mind, is the necessity of living so much in England—taking Gérard away from you. Otherwise, the people are *comme-il-faut*, the young lady is certainly handsome, and these English fortunes are very safe and substantial.”

Victor was rather surprised at himself as he said this, and felt magnanimous. Fanni also had her word to put in.

“Poor Gérard has not had much brightness in his life, maman. You might make him very happy now.”

“If Gérard chooses to marry an Englishwoman—a Protestant too—and a girl whose character I despise,” said Madame de Maulévrier, “it will be nothing to me if he lives all the year in England. I have done my best to make his life happy; if I have failed it has not been my fault. These are strange times we live in, when a son chooses his own wife, and thinks he can drag consent out of his mother. I suppose if he cannot have it he will do without it; this English ‘adoration’ is so strong. Mon Dieu, what times! and we talk of loyalty and obedience; what mere words they are!”

“I think you are mistaken, ma mère,” said Victor. “If Gérard cannot have your free consent, he will not attempt

to do without it. I believe I can answer for him so far."

"Bah! you always take Gérard's part, when I am angry with him," said the Marquise, impatiently.

She got up and walked towards the house, leaving the two under the lime-trees together.

"Maman will consent, will she not?" said Fanni, laying her hand on her husband's shoulder.

"Yes," said Victor.

CHAPTER XII.

“HOUSED IN A DREAM.”

GÉRARD and his mother had a long talk that night, and the Marquise at last consented that he should go to England, and should ask Pauline Mowbray, English fashion, to be his wife. They had no violent argument; Madame de Maulévrier was gentle with him; she perceived that it was another fated disappointment, coming from the child whose doings affected her most. He would not or could not, last year, marry to please her; now he must marry to please himself, and she must give up the hope of his companionship, which had done much to console her before.

With all her prejudices, she was a reasonable, fair-minded woman, and it was sometimes an advantage to her children that with her duty came before love. Fanni's remark, that Gérard had not had much brightness in his life, had touched her keenly; here in Paris, as she looked round on other young men, she felt that it was true; and arguing from this she discovered that it was now her duty to let Gérard please himself. She was not at all sentimental; she did not pretend to like the idea of Pauline Mowbray as a daughter-in-law; she asked a good many business-like questions about her fortune, and made Victor ask more the next day; Gérard was quite unable to answer them all. He only knew that Miss Mowbray was rich, and that Pauline was to be her heir. Had she made her will? he could not say; but Mr. Mowbray had told him that she intended

to give Pauline a thousand a year when she married; and this sounded satisfactory.

In the next few days the Marquise returned alone to Maulévrier, and Gérard went to England. He met Mr. Mowbray in London, and had a long talk with him, which raised his spirits to the highest pitch of excitement. He would not go down to Sandridge; it seemed further from Croome; and besides, he did not feel inclined just now to face all his future brothers and sisters. He stayed at his old hotel, and from there he sent a few lines to Miss Mowbray, enclosed in a letter from George. Then it was almost impossible to wait for her answer.

But it came by return of post, a small note in Aunt Lucia's delicate, shaky, uncertain hand, a most polite little note of welcome. It ended with the delightful

words—"My niece and I will be glad to see you.

"Yours most sincerely,

"LUCIA MOWBRAY."

Mr. Mowbray had talked of going down with Gérard, but at the last moment he was detained by publishing business, and the young man went alone.

All the country was pink with apple-blossoms, and white with may; he gazed out of the carriage window, and thought, this sentimental young Frenchman, that England was a beautiful homelike country; it would not be difficult to make his first home there, among these smiling fields, among Pauline's kind relations. "What days and what sweet years" were now beginning for him, whose life a month ago had seemed likely to be spent alone! It was all charming, full of love and beauty;

yet in the middle of his dreams he thought of Maulévrier, gray and stony and silent among its woods; and of his little mother, as silent as her house, walking in real loneliness upon its terraces; and he half felt as if that shadow in the background was the one reality after all, and as if this cheerful England was nothing but an imagination. Could he be awake? was he going to Pauline, waiting for him behind those green downs yonder? The train stopped at Cleeve station, which at least was real.

He had two hours to wait at Cleeve; he walked up to the Point, and stood there for a long time, looking at the sea. In fact, he let himself dream and linger there almost too long, and had to hurry down to the station to catch his train. On the way he met Mr. Penny, the vicar, who stared at him with surprised recollection,

and almost stopped, but Gérard took off his hat and walked quickly on.

The short journey from Cleeve to Croome seemed very long that day, but as he drew near Croome, and remembered the shapes of the hills, the fir-groves, the high sweep of the upland fields against the sky, as he had seen it all before in his hopeless days, he began more and more to realise his happiness, his wonderful good fortune, and a wild impatience came upon him, making it almost impossible to sit still like other people in the train.

He was a little surprised, at Croome station, to find no carriage waiting for him, but he left his luggage with a porter, who, as well as the station-master, looked at him rather oddly, and walked off towards the Court without a moment's delay. The two men stood on the platform, leaning on the railings, and gazed

after him, and talked to each other, as he disappeared round the turn of the road.

He walked on, meeting nobody but one or two women and children, who stared, and stopped, and looked after him as the station men had done; but Gérard, with one thought in his mind, did not even see them. He knew exactly when he would come in sight of the Court, at the top of a little hill, where the high narrow lane ran between old thorn-bushes loaded with blossom. There were the old red chimneys, the long line of roof in the afternoon sun, the upper windows with their blinds down, the still, homelike background of elms, much greener than when he saw them before, with one black rook now and then flapping lazily in and out among the branches. The whole picture printed itself on Gérard's mind in a moment, often to be remembered afterwards.

He walked on down the hill, now losing sight of the Court, till he came to the bridge and was close upon it. How still it was! how old, how peaceful! Not a dog barked as the strange foot approached the gate; there was no sound but the clear and continual singing of birds in the garden, and the gentle splash of the river against the moss-grown piers of the bridge. The mill was not at work; there was not a sign of any human presence about the place, and as if even that soft May sunshine would be too disturbing, all the blinds were down.

"Are they all asleep? the place is as silent as Maulévrier," thought Gérard as he walked up to the door.

He pulled the bell rather impatiently, and then was sorry, for it went on ringing and pealing as if it would never stop. It seemed to make endless echoes in the

silent house; and before it had done, the butler opened the door quickly and noiselessly, and stood looking at the guest with a pale, shocked, almost indignant face. Gérard hardly noticed the man's looks at first, but something puzzled him, and he said, with a little haughtiness of manner, "Is Miss Mowbray at home? I think she expects me."

The butler turned paler still, and Gérard now looked at him in great surprise.

"Oh—" he said, hesitating—"yes, sir—but—" speaking with an effort, and very low—"I am sorry to say—Miss Mowbray is dead, sir."

CHAPTER XIII.

“YOU MUST BE GONE,” SAID DEATH,

“THESE WALKS ARE MINE.”

IT was the solemn presence of death, then, that lay over Croome Court that May afternoon, darkening its rooms, silencing all its pleasant noises. Only the birds knew better than to mourn that the free bright spirit who had loved them had been called forward into a freer and brighter state. And her flowers showed no sign of fading; they bloomed as gaily as before, and scented her house and garden as sweetly, though the tender hand that had helped their growing was to touch them no more.

Aunt Lucia was dead. She had never

had any fear of death, and had often wished to die suddenly, to escape the long pain and depression of illness, which indeed she dreaded very much. To be really old, to lose the quickness of her senses, and the activity of her limbs, to sit in a chair or lie in bed day after day, unable to move about the house, or to take care of her flowers and arrange them as she fancied—all this was a terror to her—and several times that winter, when some rheumatic pain or breathlessness had reminded her of the passing of the years, she had been quite sad for an hour, afraid that this was the beginning of a helpless old age. She had told Pauline once, that many years ago, when she was a young woman, a doctor had warned her that there was something wrong with her heart, that she must never hurry or excite or exert her-

self, and that though she might outgrow the weakness entirely, it was more likely to get worse than better.

"I hate croaking," said Aunt Lucia. "If one's tiresome body will go wrong, it must, and all the doctors in the world can't help it. I have never had anything to do with them since, my dear, and you see how well I am. About once in ten years I remember what he told me, and then I hope that, if the thing still exists, it will put an end to me quietly some day, without fuss, and without a long horrid illness."

Pauline was a little shocked, and thought this a reckless way of talking. Certainly it had not in the least prepared her for that dreadful morning, when a moment's sharp pain took her dearest friend away, without warning, without good-bye, leaving indeed a desolation behind her.

They had been talking after breakfast in the drawing-room. Aunt Lucia was moving in and out of the conservatory, watering her ferns, trying now and then to lift a flowerpot which was too heavy for her. She was talking about Gérard and his visit to her that day, when she had been afraid to like and admire him as much as she wished.

“He was very intelligent about the trees and flowers and things,” she rambled on, while Pauline sat inside the window listening, with folded hands and smiling, dreamy eyes. “I think I shall educate him into a good gardener. You won’t object, will you? it is such a nice occupation for a man in the country—and I don’t suppose he will hunt; at least he doesn’t look like it. Excuse me, my dear,” she said, with a small peal of laughter. “I admire him beyond words,

you know, but one can't have everything. A French Marquis can't be expected to have all the accomplishments of Jack Marston."

"He rides very well," said Pauline.

"No doubt—and after all it doesn't matter. The Mowbrays are not a horsey family, nor were the Dunstans. Poor Ben certainly is not. By the bye, Pauline, I hope you will always be friends with Ben. He is not likely to stay at Croome, and I don't fancy he and M. de Maulévrier will ever have much to say to each other—but you must not throw him off because of that. He has behaved very well; he really seemed pleased at my leaving Croome to you, instead of to him."

"He is very good," said Pauline. The mention of Ben threw a momentary cloud over her happiness; she thought she might have been allowed to forget him

for that day, the day when Gérard was coming.

“Yes, he *is* very good,” said Miss Mowbray. “Nobody knows him half as well as I do, and I really like him better than any one in the world, except you. But I am a stupid old woman to talk about him now—only I hope he will marry a nice girl some day, and be as happy as he deserves. How hot it is! I am tired with this watering. Don’t let us forget to send the carriage for M. de Maulévrier.”

“I ought to have been helping you,” said Pauline, penitently.

“O no, my dear, you have been thinking, and one can’t do two things at once,” said Aunt Lucia, with her pretty smile. “In your present state of mind I could not trust you with the watering-pot.”

She stepped in at the window, and sat

down quite wearily in a low chair opposite Pauline. For a few moments they were both silent; then Aunt Lucia said, "Mr. Johnson will come to-morrow afternoon, I expect. You must amuse Monsieur Gérard, while I am talking to him. I hope he won't be tiresome—Mr. Johnson, I mean—Pauline, dear; would you call Ray. I feel rather faint."

Pauline started up in sudden alarm. Her aunt, very much flushed, was sitting upright in her chair; as the girl looked she made a little exclamation, and put her hand to her side. "Call Ray," she said—"this pain—"

Pauline sprang to the bell, rang it violently, and then flew out of the room, screaming for Ray, who hurried downstairs at once. Pauline darted back, the maid following her, and fell on her knees by Aunt Lucia's side, taking her hand in

hers, but the soft cold fingers did not return the pressure.

“What is it, dear? Look up. Give her the salts, Ray. Oh, look!—she has fainted quite away.”

It was not a fainting fit, and the maid knew this very well, as she tried useless remedies. The water was still dripping from the ferns, and Aunt Lucia's face was turned towards them, smiling, as she lay back in her chair; her “green children,” as she called them, were the last to profit by her love. Poor Pauline, her adopted child, first fainting, then hysterical, completely overcome by the shock, was taken away from her and carried upstairs.

And so it was that after a morning of wild confusion and terror, the guest arriving at the Court found it solemnly still that afternoon. The doctor, and the

clergyman, Ben's substitute, had been there, and had gone away again; telegrams had been sent to John and George Mowbray, to Ben, to Mr. Johnson the old family lawyer. Ray and the butler had bestirred themselves with sad importance; everything had been done, without any knowledge or orders of the poor girl who lay in a dark room upstairs, fallen into a feverish sleep after hours of distracted sobbing. Her excitement had at first been so terrible that the doctor had given her an opiate, and now she seemed unconscious; the good Ray stole gently into her room sometimes, conquering her own grief in faithful sympathy.

"You've a wonderful lot of self-command, Mrs. Ray," said the butler, with tears running down his face. "Now I think we shall never meet with such a mistress again."

“I know that as well as you,” replied Ray. “But I’m just waiting till that poor child’s mother comes. Then I can shut myself up and have a good cry.”

It was not much wonder that these good creatures forgot the French gentleman who was expected that day.

Gérard, most deeply shocked, stood a few minutes at the door, and heard what particulars the butler chose to tell him.

“I suppose,” he said, hesitating—“I must not ask—Miss Pauline Mowbray would not see me?”

“I believe, sir, Miss Pauline is now asleep,” said the butler. “The doctor gave her a sleeping draught, I understand, and gave orders that she was not to be disturbed, on no account whatsoever.”

"Of course, quite right," said Gérard. "You expect Mr. Mowbray to-night? When he comes, will you tell him that I am staying at the hotel in Cleeve. I will not come here again till I hear from him. Give him my card, if you please."

The butler took the card and considered it. "Yes, sir," he said. He knew that the gentleman would have to wait some time for his train; he now remembered that he was coming to stay at the Court; it seemed inhospitable not to ask him in, at least for a few minutes. Who knew that Miss Pauline might not be vexed at his going away? He looked up dubiously at Gérard.

"I am very sorry, sir," he said. "I am afraid Miss Pauline cannot possibly see you. But I will enquire, if you wish—"

“No, no,—on such a day—I would not disturb her on any account,” said Gérard. “Only you will remember to give my message to Mr. Mowbray. I will stay at Cleeve till I hear from him.”

“Certainly, sir.”

Gérard walked away, leaving the Court and Pauline behind him. He was extremely shocked; his mind was full of her grief, and he also felt a personal regret for the bright, charming woman who had entertained him so kindly, and whose generous hand had given him the happiness of his life. But of course he was not altogether miserable; the thought of consoling Pauline had some sweetness in it. The delay in seeing her was painful and trying enough, and he did not know how he was to live through days at Cleeve, for he supposed he must not go to Croome again till after the

funeral. There certainly was something terribly sad in being checked by an icy hand on the very threshold of love and joy; but after all it would not be for long; her father, his friend, would not keep him away longer than was absolutely necessary for propriety's sake.

He went on building castles as he walked about the lanes near the station, waiting for the train. He must persuade Pauline to marry him as soon as she would, as quietly as she liked—perhaps that very summer; and then he would take her to France, they would once more be together at Maulévrier; and then they might go next winter to Italy; and he would not bring her back to Croome till her painful recollections had almost passed away, till she could think of her aunt with a tender sweet regret, as the kind angel who had given

her all, and so given them to each other.

Dreaming such dreams as these, Gérard went back to Cleeve, and waited there for his letter from Mr. Mowbray.

CHAPTER XIV.

S U S P E N S E.

MRS. MOWBRAY, who came down to Croome that night with her husband, was shocked and frightened by the state in which she found Pauline. The girl was almost out of her mind with grief; she hardly seemed to know anyone, or to hear what was said to her, but lay sobbing and crying from hour to hour, except when utter exhaustion, or the doctor's sleeping draught, quieted her for a short time. Then she lay in a state which was more unconsciousness than sleep, and was only roused to cry and sob and moan again, with her face buried in the pillow. Mrs.

Mowbray at last gave up trying to soothe her, and sat beside her silently, full of sad thoughts and forebodings.

The child had no doubt been very fond of Aunt Lucia, and that sudden death had been a terrible shock to her; yet it was not like Pauline to give way so utterly, so violently; and Mrs. Mowbray, as she watched her, feared and suspected the truth. This passion of Pauline's was like despair, which could not at once be realised as its own stony self; the young nature was fighting against it, refusing to believe in it; but it was there all the same.

"O, if only we had never gone to France!" thought Mrs. Mowbray. "Poor George! but I could almost say he deserves it, for having brought it on again."

“My darling,” she said to Pauline in a quieter moment, “you must not grieve so dreadfully. She would be so sorry if she could see you. Dear Aunt Lucia! she always seemed rather to belong to the angels, and now she is with them, and quite safe; you must try to remember that. She loved you so; think how you may be troubling her, with crying like this.”

“Ah, yes, she did love me,” sighed Pauline. “O, why do such dreadful, dreadful things happen!”

“We must not be rebellious—” Mrs. Mowbray began; but she said no more then, for she saw it was no use talking; the child’s grief must have its way; and these remarks and consolations only sounded foolish.

“Poor dear child!” the mother thought; “but still there is a chance—” she could

not speak to Pauline on that subject, with her aunt lying dead in the next room, but she went down to her husband, who was wandering disconsolately about in the garden, among the blossoms and the nightingales.

It was now late in the afternoon ; they had arrived the night before. Mr. Mowbray had been busy all the morning writing letters, receiving and sending telegrams. John was coming down for the funeral ; so were several other relations ; Ben Dunstan of course was coming back from his holiday. Nothing had yet been heard of Mr. Johnson, who was supposed to be away from home ; and George Mowbray, though the butler had given him Gérard's message, and he had of course been thinking of him all the time, had not yet said a word about seeing him.

The calm of the garden was very

refreshing to Mrs. Mowbray; she walked up and down with George, and told him that she had left Pauline a little quieter.

“What do you think?” she said, anxiously. “Do you really think there has not been time—”

“How can there have been time!” said her husband. “Johnson has been away ever since she made up her mind, and she never did anything without him. There she was thoroughly business-like. Of course she may possibly have left some paper, some memorandum, but nothing the least likely to be legal or formal; and I don’t expect even that.”

“She may still have done something. I mean, she may have done it before.”

“I don’t think so. Better not speculate upon it at all.”

“It will be a most dreadful misfortune

What are we to do with that poor child!"

"We must take her home and comfort her."

"Easily said," sighed Mrs. Mowbray.
"And he really has nothing?"

"Nothing. It will be impossible."

"What a pity, poor fellow, to have brought him from France so soon!"

"I don't see that that makes much difference. Suppose you don't talk any more on that subject. What's done is done."

"And what's not done," said Mrs. Mowbray, "never will be done now."

George's hopelessness seemed to her the saddest feature in the whole thing, and sent her back to Pauline with a heavy heart. If there had been a glimpse of light anywhere, he would have been sure to point it out, and make a shining star of it.

"Certainly we are most unfortunate

people," the poor woman thought to herself. "Everything we do, everything we plan, turns out badly—and I really don't know why."

George Mowbray, one may believe, had never been so unhappy in his life. Apart from the great grief of losing his aunt, who he loved sincerely, he hated the undeniable fact that a mercenary feeling added bitterness to his grief. That he, who had never flattered himself, for himself, with the hope of Aunt Lucia's inheritance, should have been fool enough to stake Pauline's happiness upon it, should have brought Gérard de Maulévrier from France on the strength of Aunt Lucia's intentions, and thus, in the terrible disappointment, should have been the means of deceiving both his child and her lover, was a state of things that seemed almost unbearable. Pauline, of course, knew or guessed the

worst; but Gérard did not. He was waiting at Cleeve, no doubt impatiently, but with full confidence in the future. How was he to be told that his friend had encouraged him too soon, too easily! George was thoroughly miserable as he paced the garden walks, and thought of Gérard. He felt as if he could not face him. It was a sort of comfort that Gérard had said he would wait at Cleeve, and not come to Croome again. He could not reasonably expect George Mowbray to go to Cleeve for a few days, at least.

The next morning came a little letter from Gérard, in French, very well expressed, with sympathy and enquiries for them all. Mr. Mowbray, to whom writing was always easy, sat down and wrote him a rather long answer. He wished to prepare the young man's mind for the trouble that was coming upon him, and

with this object he said in his letter—
“Thank you for your sympathy in our sorrow. It is a great sorrow, and one for which we were all totally unprepared. Besides being a sorrow it is a trial, a trouble, which I fear may long overshadow the lives of some of us. I fear that my grief may have something of the nature of remorse. Cannot you imagine that I may be punished very severely for too much rashness and confidence, in reckoning too surely on the future, which is so terribly uncertain for us all. I am tormented with fears, and should they be realised, I feel that you, for one, will have reason to be angry with me. Truly death is an awful experience. Coming in this way suddenly, it may be less painful to the dying, but it is certainly far more so to the survivors. All human plans fall to nothing in the face of death.”

There was more in this strain, and when the letter was gone, Mr. Mowbray's conscience felt a little lighter. If the worst came to the worst, Gérard could not say that no one had tried to prepare him for it. In a postscript Mr. Mowbray added a piece of advice which was almost too good and reasonable to be taken—that Gérard should go back to London and wait there till he heard from him. He was very much engaged, he said, in sad and painful business, which would probably extend itself a few days beyond the funeral. He thought under the circumstances Gérard would be much better in London; he might depend on him for making the suspense as short as possible.

Gérard did not at all understand the hints conveyed in this letter, though they made him vaguely uneasy. He supposed it was etiquette that Mr. Mowbray should

speaking of nothing but his grief—should not even mention Pauline's name. One thing was clear to him; it would be easier to wait here at Cleeve, in her atmosphere as it were, than among the noises of London. It surprised him a little that Mr. Mowbray should advise him to go to London; did not he know him better than that? Was he so impatient, so incapable of sympathy, that he could not respect the grief of his friends by waiting quietly here till they chose to summon him? They would no doubt go to town soon; why should not he go up with them? why should he be treated now as a stranger, who in his own mind and theirs surely belonged to them?

In his answer to Mr. Mowbray, which was very short, he did not show any sign of this slightly injured feeling, merely saying that he did not wish to leave

Cleeve, and would wait there as patiently as he could.

This was followed by two or three days' silence; the weather continued still and sunny; every day was like that day when Gérard, coming to Croome Court, was turned back so sadly from the door. Cleeve at this time of year is dressed in flowers; the orchards are rosy in the sunshine; each house is hung with clematis or Banksia roses; and in sheltered nooks of the downs wild flowers spring abundantly. It is the time for long rambles in one of the prettiest corners of England; but Gérard, though the beauty soothed his dreamy spirit, lived in it with a kind of vague indifference. He spent most of his time at the Point, on the green grass at the top of the down, staring out to sea, sometimes writing scraps of verses in a note-book. Pre-

sently some distant sound, or his own life that was lying dormant, would rouse him, and then he started up and walked up and down, or went back to the beach and the quiet streets, his repose broken for that day; the restlessness that followed was not without pain.

There are rocks at Cleeve, though not very great ones. Below the irregular houses and gardens, and the broad green strip of grass in front of them—one cannot call it a promenade, when hardly anybody walks there—a rugged rocky wall with many points and ledges shelves down to the sea. Here and there is a sort of path by which children clamber down to the shore, but the tide seldom leaves much sand for them, and it seems as if the water was generally half way up these rocks.

One afternoon Gérard had come down

from the Point, and soon getting tired of walking about the beach, had climbed a few yards down the rocks, and settled himself on a ledge which could not be seen from above. It had a back and arms, making a comfortable chair, and the full western sun baked down upon it with so much power that Gérard, who had been pretending to read, presently closed his book and his eyes too, and was only roused, after a tolerable doze, by voices talking above, within a yard or two of his head. For several minutes this talking was only a confused, unintelligible sound; the voices were those of two men, and sounded grave and dry, but presently the familiar name of Mowbray struck Gérard's ear.

“For my part, I came back by the early train. I understood that Mrs. Mowbray was there with her daughter—the poor

girl dreadfully knocked up—natural that she should be—and I thought the fewer people went to the house the better. Very nice, all the arrangements, flowers and so on. I always thought he was a man of remarkably good taste. A pleasant man, too; don't you think so?"

"Well—yes," said the other with a rather hesitating growl. "He was uncommonly dismal to-day."

"Come, Mr. Johnson, that was only natural. His aunt and he were great friends. And she was a particularly agreeable woman; just the sort of person to be missed and mourned sincerely. I must say that the world seems a little duller, now she is taken from us—with such terrible suddenness, too. Now I should have thought worse of him, if he had been cheerful to-day."

"You are a clergyman, my dear sir;

you take a better view of human nature than we lawyers do. Our position shows us the influence of legacies."

"Come, come, don't be sardonic," said the other, and they both laughed. "You don't mean to say she has left him nothing?" he went on in a graver tone. "Really! a little disappointment would be only natural—misfortunes—and a large family."

"Ah—well, not absolutely nothing. Five thousand, and three to his eldest daughter. A few smaller legacies to other nephews and nieces. They are all disappointed, between ourselves; but I don't know that they had any right to expect more. Her mother brought the property into their family; if she had married, of course not a shilling would ever have come to them. I think she has done the right thing; I thought so all along. If

there was a male representative of her mother's family, he would be her proper heir. There is one; she has made him her heir. Mrs. Mowbray said something to me—something rather unreasonable, about her having changed her intentions, and even George Mowbray seemed half to expect that another will would turn up. I don't know what they were thinking of. This will was only made last autumn."

"Dunstan is her heir, then, is he?"

"Yes. He seemed as much surprised as anybody, and not at all grateful—but he is a sentimental ass, though you wouldn't think it," said the lawyer.

"Come, come, you are severe," said the clergyman. "No, certainly—"

He was interrupted by the sudden rising of a head and shoulders from the rocks beneath him. A tall young man, very much flushed, with his hat pulled over his

eyes, climbed up in two or three steps to the level where the worthy pair were sitting on a bench, basking in the gentle south-west breeze and the afternoon sun.

Gérard, in a confused, uncertain way, had heard all that these men were saying. He had not half understood it, for the clergyman talked fast and the lawyer mumbled; if they had not several times mentioned the name of Mowbray, he would not have known in the least what they were talking about. He did not know who or what they were, or how they were acquainted with the Mowbrays; what they said about Miss Mowbray's will was more than Greek to him; yet he gathered from it that his friend Mr. Mowbray was in some way greatly disappointed. This impression reminded him of that melancholy letter, and gave him a strange

feeling of anxious insecurity. It seemed to him that these two men, whoever they were, talked in a very cool impertinent way about the affairs of his friends; and the first glance he bestowed on them, as he mounted the yard or two of rock, and stepped on the shelving turf beside them, was both angry and proud. There they sat, two most ordinary-looking men; the sturdy little lawyer, with his plain square face; the tall, thin, garrulous clergyman—both looking hard at him, who had interrupted their comfortable gossip.

Gérard took off his hat, for he recognised Mr. Penny, the vicar, who started up instantly and shook hands with him.

“How d’ye do!” said the Vicar, in a bustle. “How very strange! I saw you last on the very day that poor Miss Mowbray died. You were aware—oh, of course, and you knew her funeral was this

morning. I was there—I came back early—but Mr. Johnson was her solicitor, you know, so business kept him till the afternoon train. We were talking over the sad particulars—”

Mr. Johnson, bending curiously interested looks on Gérard, here bowed to him. Gérard returned the bow rather stiffly.

“Are you making a long stay at Cleeve?” asked the Vicar.

“I think not. I hardly know. I am waiting to see my friend Mr. Mowbray.”

“You were not at the funeral.”

“No, monsieur.”

“Mr. Mowbray will probably be in Cleeve to-morrow,” said Mr. Johnson. “He and his brother are their aunt’s executors, and there will be business to talk over at my office. The ladies, I believe, are going to London to-morrow.”

“The ladies?” said Gérard, still with

something of a haughty air, which amused Mr. Johnson.

“Mrs. Mowbray and her daughter. You know them?”

“I have that honour,” said Gérard, crushingly. The lawyer smiled and said no more.

Gérard walked away, but was presently overtaken by Mr. Penny, who, being a curious, sociable man, was bent on finding out the history of this young foreigner and his acquaintance with the Mowbrays. Gérard found it impossible to get rid of him; he did not try very hard, perhaps, for the man was good-natured, and he had nothing bearish in his disposition. Besides, it was not unpleasant to hear his friends spoken of with kindness and sympathy. Mr. Penny told him a great deal that he knew before, about their misfortunes last year; he also talked about Miss Mowbray

and her peculiarities. He made no discoveries about Gérard, who listened almost silently, except the bare fact that he had met them first in France last summer.

Gérard himself asked no questions ; but it was not long before Mr. Penny in his talkativeness made everything clear to him, so that he knew what Mr. Mowbray's fears and disappointment meant. Not that he realised at first all that it meant for him ; or he could hardly have strolled along in such quiet indifference by the vicar's side along the beach.

“Yes, it is a sad break-up,” said Mr. Penny. “It was a pleasant arrangement for all parties, Miss Mowbray's niece living with her. I used to wonder that something of the sort was not done long before, for Miss Pauline Mowbray always seemed fond of her aunt. Now of course she will go back to her own family.

How mistaken we are sometimes! In the last few months many people have suggested to me that she would be her aunt's heiress. I never thought that very likely, but I certainly did think that her father would have a very good legacy, and I am sorry for him, poor fellow. Five thousand is not a present to be despised, that's true—but Mr. Johnson says he seems disappointed. Well, he has a large family, sons growing up—no doubt he would have liked a more solid addition to his income. I am talking to you as a friend of the family."

Gérard bowed his head.

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Dunstan?"

"I know him by name. Is he not the man who came to France last year to bring Mr. Mowbray the news?"

“Yes, the same. Well, you know, he is Miss Mowbray’s only relation on her mother’s side, and I understand that Croome with most of her fortune is left to him.”

“Ah!”

It was a vague sort of exclamation, but Gérard had nothing to say.

“He is an original, certainly,” said Mr. Penny; “but a good fellow. We consider his opinions rather dangerous; in France you might call him a Red Republican, perhaps.”

“Indeed!”

“But he will sober down now. Nothing like property, nothing like responsibility, for giving a man ballast,” said Mr. Penny, smiling. “And there may be other influences. I heard once that he had a great admiration—”

Here, by some special providence, Mr.

Penny met a parishioner who wished to speak to him, and Gérard gladly escaped, hurrying away to his hotel. He had the evening and the night to think over all the consequences of this amazing news, which after all might not, could not, should not be true.

CHAPTER XV.

“WHEN FRIENDSHIPS DECAY.”

THE next morning Gérard had a note from Mr. Mowbray, saying that he was going to town by the 3.50 train that afternoon, and that if Gérard liked to join him at the station, they might as well travel up together. There was nothing more in the note than this; no explanations, no good or bad news, no mention of his wife and daughter. Gérard at first felt rather angry; he liked this even less than Mr. Mowbray's former letter, advising him to go back to town by himself. After sending for him, these people seemed very anxious to get rid of him

again; so thought the proud, sensitive, unreasonable young man, forgetting for the moment the sad causes of this change of tone. After a little consideration, however, he decided that he must meet Mr. Mowbray at the station; but he also resolved that if Pauline was still at Croome, no arguments should make him leave the country without seeing her. It was true that the lawyer who had been talking to Mr. Penny yesterday, had said that Mrs. and Miss Mowbray were going to-day to London; but Gérard did not see why that little upstart man should know anything of their intentions; still, it was possible that a journey with her father might mean a journey with her. So after a long miserable morning, he went to the station at the appointed time. Mr. Penny's information, which had haunted him all

night, seemed to-day incredible. Miss Mowbray could not, surely, have broken her word to her niece; and if she had—Gérard set his teeth, and shrugged his shoulders, and wished to express a thorough defiance of Fate; but his pale dismal looks harmonised well with those of his friend, when they met on the platform. He was inclined to be stiff in his manner to Mr. Mowbray, but this proved impossible; he was received with such cordiality and hearty feeling.

“This is not such a cheerful meeting,” said Mr. Mowbray, grasping his hand; and Gérard, looking into his worn face, withdrew at once all his selfish and unreasonable thoughts.

“Ah no, indeed!” he said, and then he asked something about Madame and Mademoiselle.

"They left this morning ; they are at Sandridge by this time," said Mr. Mowbray. "It was best to take Pauline away as soon as possible. Down there at Croome she would never have recovered from the shock."

"It was too terrible for her. We are going then—you will let me come with you to Sandridge?"

"My dear fellow, there is something that must be said first," Mr. Mowbray replied very sadly.

"But I know it already. I saw the pastor of Cleeve yesterday afternoon, and he told me all. I do not quite know what it means, but—"

"Don't you? We will talk it over in the train," said Mr. Mowbray.

He was grave, earnest, and practical. In making the state of things clear to Gérard, he allowed himself no flights of fancy, no

flattering hopes that anything could come right now. He felt like a brute as he talked to the poor young fellow, who listened to him in stony silence, gazing out of the window. It was impossible, it seemed, to be anything but harshly, cruelly, almost coarsely plain-spoken. His aunt was not to be blamed; Mr. Mowbray's voice gave way a little as he spoke of her. She had intended to make Pauline rich and happy; but time had not been given her to do this; and by a will made last autumn, Pauline came into three thousand pounds.

"About one hundred and twenty pounds a year," said Mr. Mowbray; and then there was a long pause. Gérard pulled his moustache and looked out of the window; he was now able to believe and realise the truth.

"I regret most heartily," Mr. Mowbray

went on, "that I wrote to you before the deed was done—I mean before a new will was made. It was inconsiderate, but one never takes these chances into account, somehow. Dunstan spoke handsomely to me about it. He said he was very sorry ; he knew she had changed her intentions ; she told him so ; but that does not make the will less legal, you see. The thing is his, and must remain his ; if he gave it away, we couldn't take it."

"Certainly not," said Gérard.

"So we have come to this point," said Mr. Mowbray. "The whole thing must be given up. You must forgive me, if you can, for deluding you with false hopes. It is a great grief to me, on your account and Pauline's too ; but I know you are a reasonable fellow ; you will see, as I do, that we can only give

it up. The one thing that could make it possible has not happened—never can happen now. We must shake hands and say good-bye.”

As Mr. Mowbray philosophised thus, with his eyes fixed on Gérard, he was conscious of a subtle feeling of irritation. In fact this fellow was too reasonable; he was taking it too calmly.

“I need not have bothered myself so much about his feelings,” thought George. “Is it dignity, or what? When I was young,” said the ridiculous man to himself, “would I have given a girl up without a word, because she lost her fortune?”

Presently Gérard spoke, flushing slightly.

“You talk as if it was easy to shake hands and say good-bye! One might as well shake hands with life altogether.”

"No, I don't say it is easy," said Mr. Mowbray, instantly repenting. "It is hard, and the harder you find it the better I like you. But it must be done, all the same."

"Must it?" said Gérard; adding after a minute, very low, "What will she say?"

"My dear boy," said Mr. Mowbray, "we must leave her to her mother."

"Why cannot we live like millions of our fellow-creatures?" said Gérard in the same low, dreamy tone.

"Because you can't," replied Mr. Mowbray. "At least," he went on, "you would not like it, either of you. It would be necessary for you to work; and men like you don't work, partly because there is nothing for you to do."

"Work! no," said Gérard, with a sort of shiver, and Mr. Mowbray, gravely con-

sidering him, wondered for a moment why such men were made.

Flying from one extreme to another, he began to ask himself whether this kind of thing was not confined to men of the Maulévrier stamp; whether an Englishman existed, whatever his rank, his tastes, his bringing-up, who would not welcome the idea of any possible work that might give him the woman he cared for. No doubt Mr. Mowbray paid his countrymen too high a compliment in thinking thus, prudence and selfishness, one fancies, being pretty equally divided among the nations; but like Aunt Lucia, he was too quick and enthusiastic to be fair; he judged other men by himself, and certainly Gérard's behaviour now justified him, being quite amazingly without courage or passion.

"At least one may still hope," said Gérard, after a long silence.

"What is there to hope for?"

"It is difficult to say—but in the course of a few years something might happen—"

"What could happen?"

"I really do not know. But you will consent to our being engaged—we cannot give it up now."

"I shall not consent to anything of the kind," said Mr. Mowbray, rather sternly. "Such an engagement would be nothing but long-drawn misery—why, it is too absurd to be thought of for a moment, if only because of your position. Now if you were an Englishman, and could go into some profession, or could even take a clerkship like Ralph, and get on by degrees to a few hundreds a year, I might let Pauline marry you now, in faith of the future. It would be foolish, of course, but I might, if you cared enough for each other. But as it is, you are much too

ornamental; she would want another for working days," he said, smiling slightly. "Besides, what would your mother say, either to such an engagement or such a marriage."

"The old story!" sighed Gérard. "One's impossibilities come into the world with one."

"Yes, we are all more or less handicapped. Few of us beat the impossibilities," said Mr. Mowbray.

It was a strange journey. After this Gérard moved to the other end of the carriage, flung himself into a corner, and lay back there with his face turned to the window till they were nearing London. Mr. Mowbray looked at a book, but did not read much. He felt sad enough, and was moralising in thought on the evils of resignation and obedience; virtues perhaps in themselves, but developing in some

characters into a sort of blind fatalism, an inertia, which made it really too hard for them to fight against circumstances, even in the cause dearest to them. Mr. Mowbray had seen signs of this character, this helpless hopelessness, in Gérard before, but he did not at all know its extent, and it would have surprised him to hear that if Gérard had been left to himself, under his mother's influence, he would long ago have been quietly married to Françoise de Brye. And no doubt he would have made her a good husband, though a dismal one.

If Mr. Mowbray had known all that history, his theory of the evils of obedience would have been strengthened, and perhaps, understanding Gérard better, he would quite have acquitted him of selfishness. For certainly, though the whole thing was his own fault, and he had

dragged the poor fellow into the scrape, he did not quite like to realise the immense power of money in this affair. A few thousands, more or less! was it then really true, the doctrine he had always hated, that gold was the ruling power of the world, before which even love must bow down! On the whole, Mr. Mowbray moralised himself into a cynical temper, and was not inclined to listen kindly to Gérard, when the young man at last came back to his side of the carriage.

Poor Gérard! He looked worn and pale and miserable, and he began in a deeply depressed tone:

“You are right, monsieur—you are quite right about the engagement. There is only one way. I saw it from the beginning, as clearly as you did, but I could not bear to say so. This happiness—it must be given up altogether.

I confess that. I have nothing more to say."

"I thought you would soon come to that wise conclusion," said Mr. Mowbray.

"This terrible world! I assure you, this is the greatest sadness I have ever known. It crushes the life out of me. I shall never recover it. Yet I see that you are right; it is the only thing one can do."

Mr. Mowbray nodded, without any attempt at consolation. Gérard went on for a few minutes lamenting.

"You will grant me one favour?" he said at last. "It is the only comfort I can think of now. I may never see any of you again, for this is certainly my last visit to England. You will let me come to Sandridge, and have one talk with your daughter? Remember, we have

not yet spoken to each other. One half-hour—I know she is ill and unhappy, and I will not ask for more.”

“Why,” said Mr. Mowbray, with a sort of grave impatience, “the one redeeming point in this whole affair is that you have not spoken to each other—I confess now I don’t understand you. You have made up your mind that it is impossible to marry; what, then, can you have to say to my daughter?”

Gérard flushed crimson, and did not answer him.

“No,” said Mr. Mowbray; “as her father, I may naturally have some consideration for her, and I really must decline to let her meet you at present—I don’t know what your views may be, but in my opinion such a meeting would make confusion worse confounded. Take my advice; go back to France at

once, and forget everything English as fast as you can."

Gérard relapsed into silence. Perhaps neither he [nor Mr. Mowbray was very sorry when the train ran into Paddington station, bringing their painful interview to an enforced end.

They said nothing about meeting again. Mr. Mowbray felt unhappy and awkward; he did not deceive himself, and though he might be disappointed in Gérard, he knew that the unfortunate muddle was chiefly his own fault. Gérard was almost too miserable to speak. They shook hands, and got into their two cabs, and drove off on their several ways, like hundreds of other people.

Thus and here, [as far as human eyes can see, ended M. de Maulévrier's friendship with the foreigners.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ENGLISH LETTER.

IT was a June evening once more, a gray, soft, pathetic evening. The clouds were breaking overhead, and very soon stars would be seen in those rifts of tender blue, while in the west pale yellow lights shone out from under a dark, low-hanging veil. The day had been hot and still, though not sunny, and the evening was pleasanter than the day. Birds and animals were going to sleep, hardly a leaf moved in all the clustering avenues about Maulévrier, and the old towers stood up quiet and solemn against the sky.

Gérard's mother appeared upon the

steps, and descended them slowly, leaning on her stick. She looked frail and delicate, though she held herself with as much dignified erectness as ever. Monsieur le Curé, a tall stooping figure, also stick in hand, was just walking up the avenue, almost dark under the thick lime-leaves, and faint with the sweetness of their flowers. He met her at the gate, as she was turning towards the park.

“You are going out late, madame,” he said. “And alone? where is Gérard?”

“That is what I do not know,” she answered cheerfully enough, “and I am going to look for him. He has been out all day. He came in to dinner, it is true, but hardly spoke a word, and has been out ever since. It is now nine o’clock, and the coffee is cold; but I will go back with you, if you wish.”

“On the contrary, allow me to go with you. We cannot afford to lose Gérard,” said the Curé. “He is no doubt somewhere in the park.”

“Yes, I think so. I don’t understand his humours; he has been so much more cheerful lately. How long is it now, Monsieur le Curé, since those English were here? Three years, or four?”

“Mais, madame, it is only two years! Two years, surely, in the beginning of July.”

“Impossible!” said Madame de Maulévrier.

“But I assure you. Little Gérard is about six months old; it will be two years next December since his father and mother were married, and that certainly was the year of the English invasion. And it is now just one year since Léon went to Africa.”

“Ah—I suppose you are right, but the time seems longer to me,” said Madame de Maulévrier. “Two years; then perhaps it would be unreasonable to expect Gérard to have forgotten.”

“A little,” said the Curé. “Besides, it is only one year since he was in England. But I do not think we have much to complain of. He is the same as usual; he was never the liveliest of your children, madame.”

“I know that; but I sometimes think he is not happy. Yet, I have nothing to reproach myself with, Monsieur le Curé; do you think so? I yielded to his wish last year, against my own judgment, against all my own wishes. If Gérard had become English, I believe my heart would have broken. I could not have lived alone here at Maulévrier.”

“All is ordered for the best,” said the

Curé. "I do not think, myself, that Gérard is unhappy. Look at his new interest in the poor and in the hospital."

"Something is troubling him to-day," said the Marquise. "I rather think he had an English letter."

"He does not correspond with Monsieur Mowbray?"

"No—but they might wish to catch him again, who knows! I distrust those people. Some one else may have left the girl a fortune; but this time Gérard will never have my consent. If he goes to England again it will be against my will."

"It is not likely," said the Curé, soothingly, for in her manner there was a quick, passionate excitement.

Now, even more than in former days, any one who touched Gérard touched the spring of her life.

"Look, here he comes," her old friend

went on. "He has no new plans in his head, I will answer for that."

They had walked down together towards the ponds in the park, which lay reflecting the pale tints of the sky, and the tall gray poplars on the way to Mingot's farm. The frogs were croaking; it was an evening very like that one, two years ago, when Madame de Maulévrier had informed her son that he was to marry Françoise de Brye. All her plans had crumbled to nothing; it was no wonder that she disliked the thought of those English who had spoilt Gérard's life, leading him away from all to whom he belonged, and leaving him at last, poor, stranded, disappointed, without prospect or inheritance, with nothing left but the love of his mother and the villagers. Her love indeed was worth having; but she could not be with him

always; her health was failing even now, though she would not own it; and Gérard was only seven-and-twenty.

He came strolling up from the ponds, greeting the Curé with a smile, and giving his arm to his mother to help her back up the hill. Perhaps he was a little graver than he had been lately, but the Curé saw no special signs of unhappiness. Apparently his head was full of Léon in Algeria, and the chance of trouble with some of the frontier tribes there. Madame de Maulévrier had had a letter that day from Léon, and Gérard, who had read it without much seeming interest, was now ready to talk it over with her and Monsieur Olivier. That day seemed in no way different from other days, as these three walked slowly up to the château.

The Curé drank his coffee with them,

and sat a little while in the salon. Then, as it was dark, he asked Gérard to guide him down the avenue.

In the first part of their walk he was very silent, and his old friend knew by instinct that something was coming. But nothing came till they had turned out of darkness into the village street, dimly familiar in the starlight.

“I had some news to-day,” said Gérard, suddenly. “I had a letter from Monsieur Mowbray. He tells me that his daughter is going to be married.”

“Ah—ah, indeed!” said the Curé. He thought the news excellent, but did not say so, even in the tone of his voice. “Well, Gérard—such things will happen. A good marriage, I hope?”

“His name is Dunstan. The aunt of Mr. Mowbray left him her estate, you remember. He is a pastor, and a rich man.”

“Ah! a contradiction!”

“Monsieur Mowbray says that he is also a good man.”

“We will hope so. You have not, then, told your mother this news?”

“I thought perhaps you would tell her.”

“Take my advice, dear friend, and tell her yourself this very night. I am too weak to go back now, and she is disturbed about you; she thinks you had an English letter.”

“Certainly she need not be disturbed,” said Gérard, sadly. “Very well; I will go back and set her mind at ease.”

They stood at the Curé’s gate in the dim starlight, and he laid his hand on Gérard’s shoulder.

“Je te bénis, mon enfant!” he said, tenderly. “You are a good child; we could not do without you at Maulévrier.”

Gérard wished him good-night very quietly, and when he was safe in his house, went back to his mother through the deep fragrant shades of the avenue.

THE END.

[August, 1883.]



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